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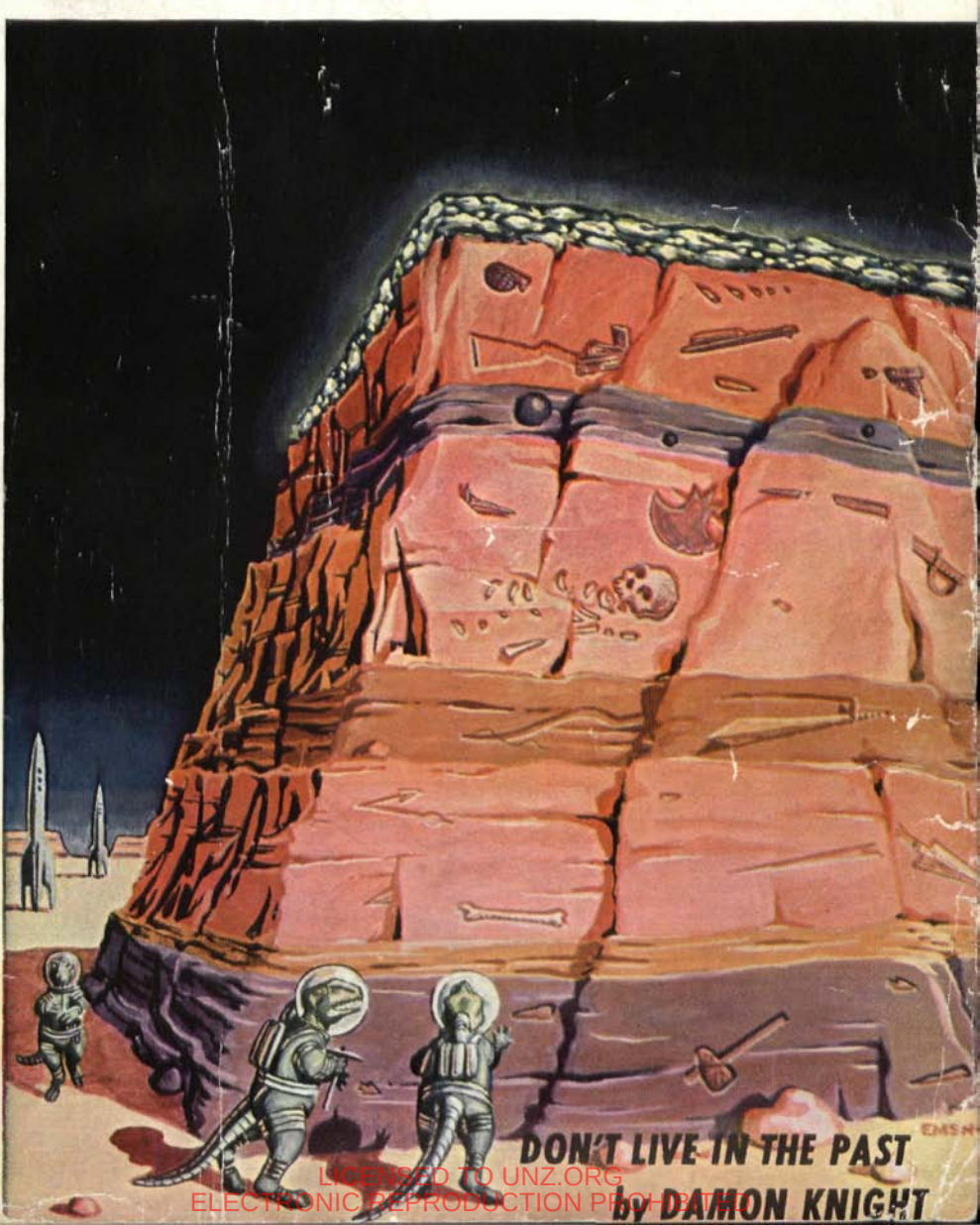

DON'T LIVE IN THE PAST
by DAMON KNIGHT

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Galaxy
SCIENCE FICTION

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June, 1951 Vol. 2, No. 3

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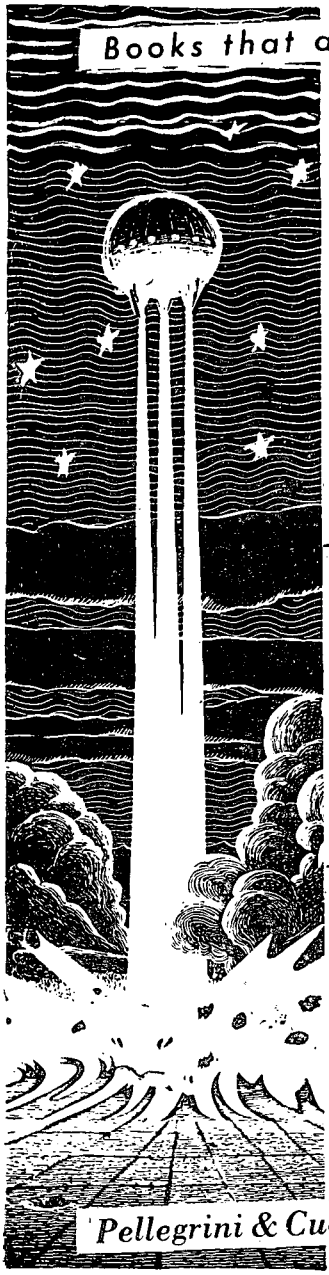

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Looking Forward

MOST of our letters are complimentary, some extravagantly so, but one by Harold W. Cheney, Jr., of Little Falls, N. Y., had the unexpected effect of reviving an emotion I haven't felt in almost 20 years of professional writing and editing. His long letter ends:

"I think there are two main reasons for the majority of readers being so favorably inclined toward editorials, a negative and a positive one. The negative one is that in magazines without a regular editor's page, things just *happen*. Nothing is explained except in barest pronouncements or the action itself. The reader feels that there is a barrier between the editor and him, so that the editor, his policy, and thence his magazine remain abstract unknowns. The reader likes to have some anticipation of what is to happen, and not to have things dished out without an explanation.

"The positive reason is more important. Remember, Mr. Gold, you are doing something that uncounted readers and fans may only dream of doing. You are editing a great science fiction magazine * * * We ask you to share with us, via your editorials, your wonderful experiences in creating the finest * * *"

The rest gets blush-provoking.

Somewhat smothered under considerably more than 5,000,000 words of stories, articles and scripts, and well over two dozen magazines, Mr. Cheney, is the dazzled boy who discovered science fiction in 1927, at the age of 13. Your letter has dug him out, for which you merit something like a rescue badge.

Amazing stories had been out for a year then, but it was Wells' *War of the Worlds*, sitting innocently on a Providence library shelf, that I found first. The personal impact was that of an explosive harpoon, and when I belatedly discovered those beautifully garish Paul covers, decorated with heroically paralyzed men in jodhpurs and simperingly paralyzed women in blowy veils, among giant insects and plants with leering heads, I was hooked.

That was a pretty skinny time for science fiction lovers. Quarters were big money for kids then, and the libraries had so few titles that each had to be read again and again.

What it did, though, was make me realize exactly what I wanted for a career. It's still what I want, though anesthetized by the daily routine of reading and sending back duels on asteroids, alien eaters of life force in the Andes, which somehow select only lovely virgins, thinking machines that go insane when asked to solve the problem of man's survival, mutant babies that have to be destroyed because they have only ten fingers . . .

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No day's mail is free of these flakes of literary dandruff, but then, unexpectedly, an *Angel's Egg* comes in and you suddenly find yourself living a story instead of glazedly following the alleged adventures of dull lushes, humorless wisecrackerss, hard-lipped Space Patrolmen, nymphomaniacal heroines who are snowy pure . . .

I don't know what the reaction will be to *Angel's Egg,* of course. It had the feel of a find, though, which is a wonderful experience.

Unfortunately, the dream of editing as good a magazine as possible does not include production difficulties. Because buying paper these days is like being mugged on a dark street, GALAXY has been late much too often. The problem is being solved and we should have no trouble reaching the newsstands on time, but it's been a headache.

Other headaches are distribution, newsstand display, rocketing costs, ruckuses over ads, sweating good stories into better stories, and improving art, which has been the biggest single gripe of readers. We could have avoided the battle over art by either eliminating it, a bad practice for circulation, or hunching down to the general science fiction level, a cowardly evasion since most of it is so damned unsightly. We're getting there with new techniques, all of which take work, anguish, worry.

Not enough, however, to spoil the pleasure of presenting *Mars Child* and the dazzling satire of *Don't Live in the Past.*

Matter of fact, looking forward to the issues coming up is a Tiffany-set, platinum-cased thrill.

Next month you'll find *Venus Is a Man's World* by William Tenn married to *Appointment in Tomorrow* by Fritz Leiber, and they make a handsome couple of novelets, as well as the startling conclusion of *Mars Child.*

Then, in the GALAXY Novels series, there will be *The Alien* by Raymond F. Jones, and, two months later, *Empire* by Clifford D. Simak, neither of which has ever appeared anywhere in print.

When *Mars Child* ends, there will be an issue of complete stories, led off by *Beyond Bedlam,* a novella by Wyman Guin, combining a new name with a new and brilliant concept in science fiction.

And then, the following month —well, maybe you've heard rumors that GALAXY has a Robert A. Heinlein novel. For once the rumors are true. The name is *The Puppet Masters*; look forward to three installments of superb suspense!

You're right, Mr. Cheney, editing GALAXY is a wonderful experience and I don't want to keep it all to myself. I'll share every bit of it, in fact, with readers who have specific questions.

What would *you* like to know and never had the chance to ask?

—H. L. GOLD

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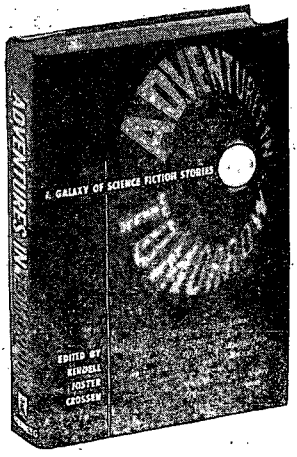

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HUNT the HUNTER

BY KRIS NEVILLE

Of course using live bait is the best way to lure dangerous alien animals . . . unless it turns out that you are the bait!

Illustrated by ELIZABETH MacINTYRE

"WE'RE somewhat to the south, I think," Ri said, bending over the crude field map. "That ridge," he pointed, "on our left, is right here." He drew a finger down the map. "It was over here," he moved the finger, "over the ridge, north of here, that we sighted them."

Extrone asked, "Is there a pass?"

Ri looked up, studying the terrain. He moved his shoulders. "I don't know, but maybe they range this far. Maybe they're on this side of the ridge, too."

Delicately, Extrone raised a hand to his beard. "I'd hate to lose a day crossing the ridge," he said.

"Yes, sir," Ri said. Suddenly he threw back his head. "Listen!"

"Eh?" Extrone said.

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"Hear it? That cough? I think that's one, from over there. Right up ahead of us."

Extrone raised his eyebrows.

This time, the coughing roar was more distant, but distinct.

"It is!" Ri said. "It's a farn beast, all right!"

Extrone smiled, almost pointed teeth showing through the beard. "I'm glad we won't have to cross the ridge."

Ri wiped his forehead on the back of his sleeve. "Yes, sir."

"We'll pitch camp right here, then," Extrone said. "We'll go after it tomorrow." He looked at the sky. "Have the bearers hurry."

"Yes, sir."

Ri moved away, his pulse gradually slowing. "You, there!" he called. "Pitch camp, here!"

He crossed to Mia, who, along with him, had been pressed into Extrone's party as guides. Once more, Ri addressed the bearers, "Be quick, now!" And to Mia, "God almighty, he was getting mad." He ran a hand under his collar. "It's a good thing that farn beast sounded off when it did. I'd hate to think of making him climb that ridge."

Mia glanced nervously over his shoulder. "It's that damned pilot's fault for setting us down on this side. I told him it was the other side. I told him so."

Ri shrugged hopelessly.

Mia said, "I don't think he even saw a blast area over here. I think he wanted to get us in trouble."

"There shouldn't be one. There shouldn't be a blast area on this side of the ridge, too."

"That's what I mean. The pilot don't like businessmen. He had it in for us."

Ri cleared his throat nervously. "Maybe you're right."

"It's the Hunting Club he don't like."

"I wish to God I'd never heard of a farn beast," Ri said. "At least, then, I wouldn't be one of his guides. Why didn't he hire somebody else?"

MIA looked at his companion. He spat. "What hurts most, he pays us for it. I could buy half this planet, and he makes me his guide—at less than I pay my secretary."

"Well, anyway, we won't have to cross that ridge."

"Hey, you!" Extrone called.

The two of them turned immediately.

"You two scout ahead," Extrone said. "See if you can pick up some tracks."

"Yes, sir," Ri said, and instantly the two of them readjusted their shoulder straps and started off.

Shortly they were inside of the scrub forest, safe from sight. "Let's wait here," Mia said.

"No, we better go on. He may have sent a spy in."

They pushed on, being careful to blaze the trees, because they were not professional guides.

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"We don't want to get too near," Ri said after toiling through the forest for many minutes. "Without guns, we don't want to get near enough for the farn beast to charge us."

They stopped. The forest was dense, the vines clinging.

"He'll want the bearers to hack a path for him," Mia said. "But we go it alone. Damn him."

Ri twisted his mouth into a sour frown. He wiped at his forehead. "Hot. By God, it's hot. I didn't think it was this hot, the first time we were here."

Mia said, "The first time, *we* weren't guides. We didn't notice it so much then."

They fought a few yards more into the forest.

Then it ended. Or, rather, there was a wide gap. Before them lay a blast area, unmistakable. The grass was beginning to grow again, but the tree stumps were roasted from the rocket breath.

"This isn't ours!" Ri said. "This looks like it was made nearly a year ago!"

Mia's eyes narrowed. "The military from Xnile?"

"No," Ri said. "They don't have any rockets this small. And I don't think there's another cargo rocket on this planet outside of the one we leased from the Club. Except the one *he* brought."

"The ones who discovered the farn beasts in the first place?" Mia asked. "You think it's their blast?"

"So?" Ri said. "But who are they?"

IT WAS Mia's turn to shrug. "Whoever they were, they couldn't have been hunters. They'd have kept the secret better."

"We didn't do so damned well."

"We didn't have a chance," Mia objected. "Everybody and his brother had heard the rumor that farn beasts were somewhere around here. It wasn't our fault Extrone found out."

"I wish we hadn't shot our guide, then. I wish he was here instead of us."

Mia shook perspiration out of his eyes. "We should have shot our pilot, too. That was our mistake. The pilot must have been the one who told Extrone we'd hunted this area."

"I didn't think a Club pilot would do that."

"After Extrone said he'd hunt farn beasts, even if it meant going to the alien system? Listen, you don't know . . . Wait a minute."

There was perspiration on Ri's upper lip.

"*I* didn't tell Extrone, if that's what you're thinking," Mia said.

Ri's mouth twisted. "I didn't say you did."

"Listen," Mia said in a hoarse whisper. "I just thought. Listen. To hell with how he found out. Here's the point. Maybe he'll shoot us, too, when the hunt's over."

Ri licked his lips. "No. He

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wouldn't do that. We're not—not just anybody. He couldn't kill us like that. Not even *him*. And besides, why would he want to do that? It wouldn't do any good to shoot us. Too many people already know about the farn beasts. You said that yourself."

Mia said, "I hope you're right." They stood side by side, studying the blast area in silence. Finally, Mia said, "We better be getting back."

"What'll we tell him?"

"That we saw tracks. What else can we tell him?"

They turned back along their trail, stumbling over vines.

"It gets hotter at sunset," Ri said nervously.

"The breeze dies down."

"It's screwy. I didn't think farn beasts had this wide a range. There must be a lot of them, to be on both sides of the ridge like this."

"There may be a pass," Mia said, pushing a vine away.

Ri wrinkled his brow, panting. "I guess that's it. If there were a lot of them, we'd have heard something before we did. But even so, it's damned funny, when you think about it."

Mia looked up at the darkening sky. "We better hurry," he said.

WHEN it came over the hastily established camp, the rocket was low, obviously looking for a landing site. It was a military craft, from the outpost on the near moon, and forward, near the nose, there was the blazoned emblem of the Ninth Fleet. The rocket roared directly over Extrone's tent, turned slowly, spouting fuel expensively, and settled into the scrub forest, turning the vegetation beneath it sere by its blasts.

Extrone sat on an upholstered stool before his tent and spat disgustedly and combed his beard with his blunt fingers.

Shortly, from the direction of the rocket, a group of four high-ranking officers came out of the forest, heading toward him. They were spruce, the officers, with military discipline holding their waists in and knees almost stiff.

"What in hell do you want?" Extrone asked.

They stopped a respectful distance away. "Sir . . ." one began.

"Haven't I told you gentlemen that rockets frighten the game?" Extrone demanded, ominously not raising his voice.

"Sir," the lead officer said, "it's another alien ship. It was sighted a few hours ago, off this very planet, sir."

Extrone's face looked much too innocent. "How did it get there, gentlemen? Why wasn't it destroyed?"

"We lost it again, sir. Temporarily, sir."

"So?" Extrone mocked.

"We thought you ought to return to a safer planet, sir. Until we could locate and destroy it."

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Extrone stared at them for a space. Then, indifferently, he turned away, in the direction of a resting bearer. "You!" he said. "Hey! Bring me a drink!" He faced the officers again. He smiled maliciously. "I'm staying here."

The lead officer licked his firm lower lip. "But, sir . . ."

Extrone toyed with his beard. "About a year ago, gentlemen, there was an alien ship around here then, wasn't there? And you destroyed it, didn't you?"

"Yes, sir. When we located it, sir."

"You'll destroy this one, too," Extrone said.

"We have a tight patrol, sir. It can't slip through. But it might try a long range bombardment, sir."

EXTRONE said, "To begin with, they probably don't even know I'm here. And they probably couldn't hit this area if they did know. And you can't afford to let them get a shot at me, anyway."

"That's why we'd like you to return to an inner planet, sir."

Extrone plucked at his right ear lobe, half closing his eyes. "You'll lose a fleet before you'll dare let anything happen to me, gentlemen. I'm quite safe here, I think."

The bearer brought Extrone his drink.

"Get off," Extrone said quietly to the four officers.

Again they turned reluctantly. This time, he did not call them back. Instead, with amusement, he watched until they disappeared into the tangle of forest.

Dusk was falling. The takeoff blast of the rocket illuminated the area, casting weird shadows on the gently swaying grasses; there was a hot breath of dry air, and the rocket dwindled toward the stars.

Extrone stood up lazily, stretching. He tossed the empty glass away, listened for it to shatter. He reached out, parted the heavy flap to his tent.

"Sir?" Ri said, hurrying toward him in the gathering darkness.

"Eh?" Extrone said, turning, startled. "Oh, you. Well?"

"We . . . located signs of the farn beast, sir. To the east."

Extrone nodded. After a moment he said, "You killed one, I believe, on *your* trip?"

Ri shifted. "Yes, sir."

Extrone held back the flap of the tent. "Won't you come in?" he asked without any politeness whatever.

Ri obeyed the order.

The inside of the tent was luxurious. The bed was of bulky feathers, costly of transport space, the sleep curtains of silken gauze. The floor, heavy, portable tile blocks, not the hollow kind, were neatly and smoothly inset into the ground. Hanging from the center, to the left of the slender, hand-carved center pole, was a chain of crystals. They tinkled lightly when Extrone dropped the flap. The light

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was electric from a portable dynamo. Extrone flipped it on. He crossed to the bed, sat down.

"You were, I believe, the first ever to kill a farn beast?" he said.

"I . . . No, sir. There must have been previous hunters, sir."

EXTRONE narrowed his eyes. "I see by your eyes that you are envious—that is the word, isn't it?—of my tent."

Ri looked away from his face.

"Perhaps I'm envious of your reputation as a hunter. You see, I have never killed a farn beast. In fact, I haven't *seen* a farn beast."

Ri glanced nervously around the tent, his sharp eyes avoiding Extrone's glittering ones. "Few people have seen them, sir."

"Oh?" Extrone questioned mildly. "I wouldn't say that. I understand that the aliens hunt them quite extensively . . . on some of their planets."

"I meant in our system, sir."

"Of course you did," Extrone said, lazily tracing the crease of his sleeve with his forefinger. "I imagine these are the only farn beasts in our system."

Ri waited uneasily, not answering.

"Yes," Extrone said, "I imagine they are. It would have been a shame if you had killed the last one. Don't you think so?"

Ri's hands worried the sides of his outer garment. "Yes, sir. It would have been."

Extrone pursed his lips. "It wouldn't have been very considerate of you to— But, still, you gained valuable experience. I'm glad you agreed to come along as my guide."

"It was an honor, sir."

Extrone's lip twisted in wry amusement. "If I had waited until it was safe for me to hunt on an alien planet, I would not have been able to find such an illustrious guide."

". . . I'm flattered, sir."

"Of course," Extrone said. "But you should have spoken to me about it, when you discovered the farn beast in our own system."

"I realize that, sir. That is, I had intended at the first opportunity, sir . . ."

"Of course," Extrone said dryly. "Like all of my subjects," he waved his hand in a broad gesture, "the highest as well as the lowest slave, know me and love me. I know your intentions were the best."

Ri squirmed, his face pale. "We do indeed love you, sir."

Extrone bent forward. "*Know* me and love me."

"Yes, sir. *Know* you and love you, sir," Ri said.

"Get out!" Extrone said.

"IT'S frightening," Ri said, "to be that close to him."

Mia nodded.

The two of them, beneath the leaf-swollen branches of the gnarled tree, were seated on their sleeping

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bags. The moon was clear and cold and bright in a cloudless sky; a small moon, smooth-surfaced, except for a central mountain ridge that bisected it into almost twin hemispheres.

"To think of him. As flesh and blood. Not like the—well, that—what we've read about."

Mia glanced suspiciously around him at the shadows. "You begin to understand a lot of things, after seeing him."

Ri picked nervously at the cover of his sleeping bag.

"It makes you think," Mia added. He twitched. "I'm afraid. I'm afraid he'll . . . Listen, we'll talk. When we get back to civilization. You, me, the bearers. About him. He can't let that happen. He'll kill us first."

Ri looked up at the moon, shivering. "No. We have friends. We have influence. He couldn't just like that—"

"He could say it was an accident."

"No," Ri said stubbornly.

"He can say anything," Mia insisted. "He can make people believe anything. Whatever he says. There's no way to check on it."

"It's getting cold," Ri said.

"Listen," Mia pleaded.

"No," Ri said. "Even if we tried to tell them, they wouldn't listen. Everybody would *know* we were lying. Everything they've come to believe would tell them we were lying. Everything they've read, every picture they've seen. They wouldn't believe us. *He* knows that."

"Listen," Mia repeated intently. "This is important. Right now he couldn't afford to let us talk. Not right now. Because the Army is not against him. Some officers were here, just before we came back. A bearer overheard them talking. They don't *want* to overthrow him!"

Ri's teeth, suddenly, were chattering.

"That's another lie," Mia continued. "That he protects the people from the Army. That's a lie. I don't believe they were *ever* plotting against him. Not even at first. I think they *helped* him, don't you see?"

Ri whined nervously.

"It's like this," Mia said. "I see it like this. The Army *put* him in power when the people were in rebellion against military rule."

RI swallowed. "We couldn't make the people believe that."

"No?" Mia challenged. "Couldn't we? Not today, but what about tomorrow? You'll see. Because I think the Army is getting ready to invade the alien system!"

"The people won't support them," Ri answered woodenly.

"*Think.* If he tells them to, they will. They trust him."

Ri looked around at the shadows.

"That explains a lot of things," Mia said. "I think the Army's been preparing for this for a long time.

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From the first, maybe. That's why Extrone cut off our trade with the aliens. Partly to keep them from learning that he was getting ready to invade them, but more to keep them from exposing *him* to the people. The aliens wouldn't be fooled like we were, so easy."

"No!" Ri snapped. "It was to keep the natural economic balance."

"You know that's not right."

Ri lay down on his bed roll. "Don't talk about it. It's not good to talk like this. I don't even want to listen."

"When the invasion starts, he'll have to command *all* their loyalties. To keep them from revolt again. They'd be ready to believe us, then. He'll have a hard enough time without people running around trying to tell the truth."

"You're wrong. He's not like that. I know you're wrong."

Mia smiled twistedly. "How many has he already killed? How can we even guess?"

Ri swallowed sickly.

"Remember our guide? To keep our hunting territory a secret?"

Ri shuddered. "That's different. Don't you see? This is not at all like that."

WITH morning came birds' songs, came dew, came breakfast smells. The air was sweet with cooking, and it was nostalgic, childhoodlike, uncontaminated.

And Extrone stepped out of the tent, fully dressed, surly, letting the flap slap loudly behind him. He stretched hungrily and stared around the camp, his eyes still vacant-mean with sleep.

"Breakfast!" he shouted, and two bearers came running with a folding table and chair. Behind them, a third bearer, carrying a tray of various foods; and yet behind him, a fourth, with a steaming pitcher and a drinking mug.

Extrone ate hugely, with none of the delicacy sometimes affected in his conversational gestures. When he had finished, he washed his mouth with water and spat on the ground.

"Lin!" he said.

His personal bearer came loping toward him.

"Have you read that manual I gave you?"

Lin nodded. "Yes."

Extrone pushed the table away. He smacked his lips wetly. "Very ludicrous, Lin. Have you noticed that I have two businessmen for guides? It occurred to me when I got up. They would have spat on me, twenty years ago, damn them."

Lin waited.

"Now I can spit on them, which pleases me."

"The farn beasts are dangerous, sir," Lin said.

"Eh? Oh, yes. Those. What did the manual say about them?"

"I believe they're carnivorous, sir."

"An alien manual. That's ludicrous, too. That we have the only

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information on our newly discovered fauna from an alien manual—and, of course, two businessmen."

"They have very long, sharp fangs, and, when enraged, are capable of tearing a man—"

"An alien?" Extrone corrected.

"There's not enough difference between us to matter, sir. Of tearing an alien to pieces, sir."

Extrone laughed harshly. "It's 'sir' whenever you contradict me?"

Lin's face remained impassive. "I guess it seems that way. Sir."

"Damned few people would dare go as far as you do," Extrone said. "But you're afraid of me, too, in your own way, aren't you?"

Lin shrugged. "Maybe."

"I can see you are. Even my wives are. I wonder if anyone can know how wonderful it feels to have people *all* afraid of you."

"The farn beasts, according to the manual . . ."

"You are very insistent on one subject."

". . . It's the only thing I know anything about. The farn beast, as I was saying, sir, is the particular enemy of men. Or if you like, of aliens. Sir."

"All right," Extrone said, annoyed. "I'll be careful."

In the distance, a farn beast coughed.

Instantly alert, Extrone said, "Get the bearers! Have some of them cut a path through that damn thicket! And tell those two businessmen to get the hell over here!"

Lin smiled, his eyes suddenly afire with the excitement of the hunt.

FOUR hours later, they were well into the scrub forest. Extrone walked leisurely, well back of the cutters, who hacked away, methodically, at the vines and branches which might impede his forward progress. Their sharp, awkward knives snickered rhythmically to the rasp of their heavy breathing.

Occasionally, Extrone halted, motioned for his water carrier, and drank deeply of the icy water to allay the heat of the forest, a heat made oppressive by the press of foliage against the outside air.

Ranging out, on both sides of the central body, the two businessmen fought independently against the wild growth, each scouting the flanks for farn beasts, and ahead, beyond the cutters, Lin flittered among the tree trunks, sometimes far, sometimes near.

Extrone carried the only weapon, slung easily over his shoulder, a powerful blast rifle, capable of piercing medium armor in sustained fire. To his rear, the water carrier was trailed by a man bearing a folding stool, and behind him, a man carrying the heavy, high-powered two-way communication set.

Once Extrone unslung his blast rifle and triggered a burst at a tiny, arboreal mammal, which, upon the impact, shattered asunder, to Ex-

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trone's satisfied chuckle, in a burst of blood and fur.

When the sun stood high and heat exhaustion made the near-naked bearers slump, Extrone permitted a rest. While waiting for the march to resume, he sat on the stool with his back against an ancient tree and patted, reflectively, the blast rifle, lying across his legs.

"For you, sir," the communications man said, interrupting his reverie.

"Damn," Extrone muttered. His face twisted in anger. "It better be important." He took the head-set and mike and nodded to the bearer. The bearer twiddled the dials.

"Extrone. Eh? . . . Oh, you got their ship. Well, why in hell bother me? . . . All right, so they found out I was here. You got them, didn't you?"

"Blasted them right out of space," the voice crackled excitedly. "Right in the middle of a radio broadcast, sir."

"I don't want to listen to your gabbling when I'm hunting!" Extrone tore off the head-set and handed it to the bearer. "If they call back, find out what they want, first. I don't want to be bothered unless it's important."

"Yes, sir."

Extrone squinted up at the sun; his eyes crinkled under the glare, and perspiration stood in little droplets on the back of his hands.

Lin, returning to the column, threaded his way among reclining bearers. He stopped before Extrone and tossed his hair out of his eyes. "I located a spoor," he said, suppressed eagerness in his voice. "About a quarter ahead. It looks fresh."

Extrone's eyes lit with passion.

Lin's face was red with heat and grimy with sweat. "There were two, I think."

"Two?" Extrone grinned, petting the rifle. "You and I better go forward and look at the spoor."

Lin said, "We ought to take protection, if you're going, too."

Extrone laughed. "This is enough." He gestured with the rifle and stood up.

"I wish you had let me bring a gun along, sir," Lin said.

"One is enough in *my* camp."

THE two of them went forward, alone, into the forest. Extrone moved agilely through the tangle, following Lin closely. When they came to the tracks, heavily pressed into drying mud around a small watering hole, Extrone nodded his head in satisfaction.

"This way," Lin said, pointing, and once more the two of them started off.

They went a good distance through the forest, Extrone becoming more alert with each additional foot. Finally, Lin stopped him with a restraining hand. "They may be quite a way ahead. Hadn't we ought to bring up the column?"

The farn beast, somewhere be-

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yond a ragged clump of bushes, coughed. Extrone clenched the blast rifle convulsively.

The farn beast coughed again, more distant this time.

"They're moving away," Lin said.

"Damn!" Extrone said.

"It's a good thing the wind's right, or they'd be coming back, and fast, too."

"Eh?" Extrone said.

"They charge on scent, sight, or sound. I understand they will track down a man for as long as a day."

"Wait," Extrone said, combing his beard. "Wait a minute."

"Yes?"

"Look," Extrone said. "If that's the case, why do we bother tracking them? Why not make them come to us?"

"They're too unpredictable. It wouldn't be safe. I'd rather have surprise on our side."

"You don't seem to see what I mean," Extrone said. "*We* won't be the—ah—the bait."

"Oh?"

"Let's get back to the column."

"EXTRONE wants to see you," Lin said.

Ri twisted at the grass shoot, broke it off, worried and unhappy. "What's he want to see *me* for?"

"I don't know," Lin said curtly.

Ri got to his feet. One of his hands reached out, plucked nervously at Lin's bare forearm. "Look," he whispered. "You know him. I have—a little money. If you were able to . . . if he wants," Ri gulped, "to *do* anything to me—I'd pay you, if you could . . ."

"You better come along," Lin said, turning.

Ri rubbed his hands along his thighs; he sighed, a tiny sound, ineffectual. He followed Lin beyond an outcropping of shale to where Extrone was seated, petting his rifle.

Extrone nodded genially. "The farn beast hunter, eh?"

"Yes, sir."

Extrone drummed his fingers on the stock of the blast rifle. "Tell me what they look like," he said suddenly.

"Well, sir, they're . . . uh . . ."

"Pretty frightening?"

"No, sir . . . Well, in a way, sir."

"But *you* weren't afraid of them, were you?"

"No, sir. No, because . . ."

Extrone was smiling innocently. "Good. I want you to do something for me."

"I . . . I . . ." Ri glanced nervously at Lin out of the tail of his eye. Lin's face was impassive.

"Of *course* you will," Extrone said genially. "Get me a rope, Lin. A good, long, strong rope."

"What are you going to do?" Ri asked, terrified.

"Why, I'm going to tie the rope around your waist and stake you out as bait."

"No!"

"Oh, come now. When the farn

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beast hears you scream—you *can* scream, by the way?"

Ri swallowed.

"We could find a way to make you."

There was perspiration trickling down Ri's forehead, a single drop, creeping toward his nose.

"You'll be safe," Extrone said, studying his face with amusement. "I'll shoot the animal before it reaches you."

Ri gulped for air. "But . . . if there should be more than one?"

Extrone shrugged.

"I— Look, sir. Listen to me." Ri's lips were bloodless and his hands were trembling. "It's not me you want to do this to. It's Mia, sir. *He* killed a farn beast before *I* did, sir. And last night—last night, he—"

"He what?" Extrone demanded, leaning forward intently.

Ri breathed with a gurgling sound. "He said he ought to kill you, sir. That's what he said. I heard him, sir. He said he ought to kill you. He's the one you ought to use for bait. Then if there was an accident, sir, it wouldn't matter, because he said he ought to kill you. I wouldn't . . ."

Extrone said, "Which one is he?"

"That one. Right over there."

"The one with his back to me?"

"Yes, sir. That's him. That's him, sir."

Extrone aimed carefully and fired, full charge, then lowered the rifle and said, "Here comes Lin with the rope, I see."

Ri was greenish. "You . . . you . . ."

Extrone turned to Lin. "Tie one end around his waist."

"Wait," Ri begged, fighting off the rope with his hands. "You don't want to use me, sir. Not after I told you . . . Please, sir. If anything should happen to me . . . Please, sir. Don't do it."

"Tie it," Extrone ordered.

"No, sir. Please. Oh, *please* don't, sir."

"Tie it," Extrone said inexorably.

Lin bent with the rope; his face was colorless.

THEY were at the watering hole —Extrone, Lin, two bearers, and Ri.

Since the hole was drying, the left, partially exposed bank was steep toward the muddy water. Upon it was green, new grass, tender-tuffed, half mashed in places by heavy animal treads. It was there that they staked him out, tying the free end of the rope tightly around the base of a scaling tree.

"You will scream," Extrone instructed. With his rifle, he pointed across the water hole. "The farn beast will come from this direction, I imagine."

Ri was almost slobbering in fear.

"Let me hear you scream," Extrone said.

Ri moaned weakly.

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"You'll have to do better than that." Extrone inclined his head toward a bearer, who used something Ri couldn't see.

Ri screamed.

"See that you keep it up that way," Extrone said. "That's the way I want you to sound." He turned toward Lin. "We can climb this tree, I think."

Slowly, aided by the bearers, the two men climbed the tree, bark peeling away from under their rough boots. Ri watched them hopelessly.

Once at the crotch, Extrone settled down, holding the rifle at alert. Lin moved to the left, out on the main branch, rested in a smaller crotch.

Looking down, Extrone said, "Scream!" Then, to Lin, "You feel the excitement? It's always in the air like this at a hunt."

"I feel it," Lin said.

Extrone chuckled. "You were with me on Meizque?"

"Yes."

"That was something, that time." He ran his hand along the stock of the weapon.

The sun headed west, veiling itself with trees; a large insect circled Extrone's head. He slapped at it, angry. The forest was quiet, underlined by an occasional piping call, something like a whistle. Ri's screams were shrill, echoing away, shiveringly. Lin sat quiet, hunched.

Extrone's eyes narrowed, and he began to pet the gun stock with quick, jerky movements. Lin licked his lips, keeping his eyes on Extrone's face. The sun seemed stuck in the sky, and the heat squeezed against them, sucking at their breath like a vacuum. The insect went away. Still, endless, hopeless, monotonous, Ri screamed.

A FARN beast coughed, far in the matted forest.

Extrone laughed nervously. "He must have heard."

"We're lucky to rouse one so fast," Lin said.

Extrone dug his boot cleats into the tree, braced himself. "I like this. There's more excitement in waiting like this than in anything I know."

Lin nodded.

"The waiting, itself, is a lot. The suspense. It's not only the killing that matters."

"It's not only the killing," Lin echoed.

"You understand?" Extrone said. "How it is to wait, knowing in just a minute something is going to come out of the forest, and you're going to kill it?"

"I know," Lin said.

"But it's not *only* the killing. It's the waiting, too."

The farn beast coughed again; nearer.

"It's a different one," Lin said.

"How do you know?"

"Hear the lower pitch, the more of a roar?"

"Hey!" Extrone shouted. "You,

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down there. There are two coming. Now let's hear you really scream!"

Ri, below, whimpered childishly and began to retreat toward the tether tree, his eyes wide.

"There's a lot of satisfaction in fooling them, too," Extrone said. "Making them come to your bait, where you can get at them." He opened his right hand. "Choose your ground, set your trap. Bait it." He snapped his hand into a fist, held the fist up before his eyes, imprisoning the idea. "Spring the trap when the quarry is inside. Clever. That makes the waiting more interesting. Waiting to see if they really will come to your bait."

Lin shifted, staring toward the forest.

"I've always liked to hunt," Extrone said. "More than anything else, I think."

Lin spat toward the ground. "People should hunt because they have to. For food. For safety."

"No," Extrone argued. "People should hunt for the love of hunting."

"Killing?"

"Hunting," Extrone repeated harshly.

THE farn beast coughed. Another answered. They were very near, and there was a noise of crackling underbrush.

"He's good bait," Extrone said. "He's fat enough and he knows how to scream good."

Ri had stopped screaming; he was huddled against the tree, fearfully eying the forest across from the watering hole.

Extrone began to tremble with excitement. "Here they come!"

The forest sprang apart. Extrone bent forward, the gun still across his lap.

The farn beast, its tiny eyes red with hate, stepped out on the bank, swinging its head wildly, its nostrils flaring in anger. It coughed. Its mate appeared beside it. Their tails thrashed against the scrubs behind them, rattling leaves.

"Shoot!" Lin hissed. "For God's sake, shoot!"

"Wait," Extrone said. "Let's see what they do." He had not moved the rifle. He was tense, bent forward, his eyes slitted, his breath beginning to sound like an asthmatic pump.

The lead farn beast sighted Ri. It lowered its head.

"Look!" Extrone cried excitedly. "Here it comes!"

Ri began to scream again.

Still Extrone did not lift his blast rifle. He was laughing. Lin waited, frozen, his eyes staring at the farn beast in fascination.

The farn beast plunged into the water, which was shallow, and, throwing a sheet of it to either side, headed across toward Ri.

"Watch! Watch!" Extrone cried gleefully.

And then the aliens sprang their trap.

—KRIS NEVILLE

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angel's egg

BY EDGAR PANGBORN

When adopting a pet, choose the species that is most intelligent, obedient, loyal, fun to play with, yet a shrewd, fearless protector. For the best in pets—choose a human being!

MR. Cleveland McCarran
Federal Bureau of Investigation
Washington, D. C.

Dear Sir:

In compliance with your request, I enclose herewith a transcript of the pertinent sections of the journal of Dr. David Bannerman, deceased. The original document is being held at this office until proper disposition can be determined.

Our investigation has shown no connection between Dr. Bannerman and any organization, subversive or otherwise. So far as we can learn he was exactly what he seemed, an inoffensive summer resident, retired, with a small independent income—a recluse to some extent, but well

Illustrated by DAVID STONE

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spoken of by local tradesmen and other neighbors. A connection between Dr. Bannerman and the type of activity that concerns your Department would seem most unlikely.

The following information is summarized from the earlier parts of Dr. Bannerman's journal, and tallies with the results of our own limited inquiry.

He was born in 1898 at Springfield, Massachusetts, attended public school there, and was graduated from Harvard College in 1922, his studies having been interrupted by two years' military service. He was wounded in action in the Argonne, receiving a spinal injury. He earned a doctorate in Biology, 1926. Delayed after-effects of his war injury necessitated hospitalization, 1927-'28. From 1929 to 1948 he taught elementary sciences in a private school in Boston. He published two textbooks in introductory biology, 1929 and 1937. In 1948 he retired from teaching: a pension and a modest income from textbook royalties evidently made this possible.

Aside from the spinal injury, which caused him to walk with a stoop, his health is said to have been fair. Autopsy findings suggested that the spinal condition must have given him considerable pain; he is not known to have mentioned this to anyone, not even his physician, Dr. Lester Morse. There is no evidence whatever of drug addiction or alcoholism.

At one point early in his journal, Dr. Bannerman describes himself as "a naturalist of the puttering type. I would rather sit on a log than write monographs; it pays off better." Dr. Morse, and others who knew Dr. Bannerman personally, tell me that this conveys a hint of his personality.

I AM not qualified to comment on the material of this journal, except to say that I have no evidence to support (or to contradict) Dr. Bannerman's statements. The journal has been studied only by my immediate superiors, by Dr. Morse, and by myself. I take it for granted you will hold the matter in strictest confidence.

With the journal I am also enclosing a statement by Dr. Morse, written at my request for our records and for your information. You will note that he says, with some qualifications, that "death was not inconsistent with an embolism." He has signed a death certificate on that basis. You will recall from my letter of August 5 that it was Dr. Morse who discovered Dr. Bannerman's body. Because he was a close personal friend of the deceased, Dr. Morse did not feel able to perform the autopsy himself. It was done by a Dr. Stephen Clyde of this city, and was virtually negative as regards cause of death, neither confirming nor contradicting Dr. Morse's original tentative diagnosis. If you wish to read the

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autopsy report in full, I shall be glad to forward a copy.

Dr. Morse tells me that so far as he knows, Dr. Bannerman had no near relatives. He never married. For the last twelve summers he occupied a small cottage on a back road about twenty-five miles from this city, and had few visitors. The neighbor Steele mentioned in the journal is a farmer, age 68, of good character, who tells me he "never got really acquainted with Dr. Bannerman."

At this office we feel that unless new information comes to light, further active investigation is hardly justified.

Respectfully yours,
Garrison Blaine
Capt., State Police
Augusta, Me.

Encl: Extract from Journal of David Bannerman, dec'd.
Statement by Lester Morse, M.D.

* * *

LIBRARIAN'S NOTE: The following document, originally attached as an unofficial "rider" to the foregoing letter, was donated to this institution in 1994 through the courtesy of Mrs. Helen McCarran, widow of the martyred first President of the World Federation. Other personal and state papers of President McCarran, many of them dating from the early period when he was employed by the FBI, are accessible to public view at the Institute of World History, Copenhagen.

* * *

EXTRACT FROM JOURNAL OF DAVID BANNERMAN JUNE 1—JULY 29, 1951

IT MUST have been at least three weeks ago when we had that flying saucer flurry. Observers the other side of Katahdin saw it come down this side; observers this side saw it come down the other. Size anywhere from six inches to sixty feet in diameter (or was it cigar-shaped?) and speed whatever you please. Seem to recall that witnesses agreed on a rosy-pink light. There was the inevitable gobbledegookery of official explanation designed to leave everyone impressed, soothed and disappointed.

I paid scant attention to the excitement and less to the explanations—naturally, I thought it was just a flying saucer. But now Camilla has hatched out an angel.

I have eight hens, all yearlings except Camilla; this is her third spring. I boarded her two winters at my neighbor Steele's farm when I closed this shack and shuffled my chilly bones off to Florida, because even as a pullet she had a manner which overbore me. I could never have eaten Camilla. If she had looked at the ax with that same expression of rancid disapproval (and

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she would) I should have felt I was beheading a favorite aunt. Her only concession to sentiment is the annual rush of maternity to the brain—normal, for a case-hardened White Plymouth Rock.

This year she stole a nest successfully, in a tangle of blackberry. By the time I located it, I estimated I was about two weeks too late. I had to outwit her by watching from a window; she is far too acute to be openly trailed from feeding ground to nest. When I had bled and pruned my way to her hideout, she was sitting on nine eggs and hating my guts. They could not be fertile, since I keep no rooster, and I was about to rob her when I saw the ninth egg was not hers, nor any other chicken's.

IT WAS a deep blue, transparent, with flecks of inner light that made me think of the first stars in a clear evening. It was the same size as Camilla's eggs. There was an embryo, but nothing I could recognize.

I returned the egg to Camilla's bare and fevered breastbone, and went back to the house for a long cool drink.

That was ten days ago. I know I ought to have kept a record; I examined the blue egg every day, watching how some nameless life grew within it, until finally the angel chipped the shell deftly in two parts. This was evidently done with the aid of small horny outgrowths on her elbows; these growths were sloughed off on the second day.

I wish I had seen her break the shell, but when I visited the blackberry tangle three days ago she was already out. She poked her exquisite head through Camilla's neck feather, smiled sleepily, and snuggled back into darkness to finish drying off. So what could I do, more than save the broken shell and wriggle my clumsy self out of there?

I had removed Camilla's own eggs the day before—Camilla was only moderately annoyed. I was nervous about disposing of them even though they were obviously Camilla's, but no harm was done. I cracked each one to be sure. Very frankly rotten eggs and nothing more.

In the evening of that day I thought of rats and weasels, as I should have earlier. I hastily prepared a box in the kitchen and brought the two in, the angel quiet in my closed hand. They are there now. I think they are comfortable.

Three days after hatching, the angel is the length of my forefinger, say three inches tall, with about the relative proportions of a six-year-old girl. Except for head, hands, and probably the soles of her feet, she is clothed in feathery down the color of ivory. What can be seen of her skin is a glowing pink—I do mean glowing, like the inside of certain seashells. Just

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above the small of her back are two stubs which I take to be infantile wings. They do not suggest an extra pair of specialized forelimbs. I think they are wholly differentiated organs; perhaps they will be like the wings of an insect. Somehow I never thought of angels buzzing. Maybe she won't. I know very little about angels.

AT PRESENT the stubs are covered with some dull tissue, no doubt a protective sheath to be discarded when the membranes (if they are membranes) are ready to grow. Between the stubs is a not very prominent ridge—special musculature, I suppose. Otherwise her shape is quite human, even to a pair of minuscule mammalian pinheads just visible under the down.

How that can make sense in an egg-laying organism is beyond my comprehension. Just for the record, so is a Corot landscape; so is Schubert's Unfinished; so is the flight of a hummingbird, or the otherworld of frost on a windowpane.

The down on her head has grown visibly in three days and is of different quality from the body down. Later it may resemble human hair, probably as a diamond resembles a chunk of granite . . .

A curious thing has happened. I went to Camilla's box after writing that. Judy* was already lying in front of it, unexcited. The angel's head was out from under the feathers, and I thought, with more verbal distinctness than such thoughts commonly take, *So here I am, a naturalist of middle years and cold sober, observing a three-inch oviparous mammal with down and wings.*

The thing is—she giggled!

Now it might have been only amusement at my appearance, which to her must be enormously gross and comic. But another thought formed unspoken: *I am no longer lonely.* And her face, hardly bigger than a dime, immediately changed from laughter to a brooding and friendly thoughtfulness.

Judy and Camilla are old friends. Judy seems untroubled by the angel. I have no worries about leaving them alone together.

June 3

I MADE no entry last night. The angel was talking to me, and when that was finished I drowsed off immediately on a cot which I have moved into the kitchen to be near them.

I had never been strongly impressed by the evidence for extrasensory perception. It is fortunate that my mind was able to accept the novelty, since to the angel it is clearly a matter of course. Her tiny mouth is most expressive, but moves only for that reason and for eating—not for speech. Probably

*Dr. Bannerman's dog, mentioned often earlier in the journal, a nine-year-old English setter. According to an entry of May 15, 1951, she was then beginning to go blind—BLAINE

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she could speak to her own kind if she wished, but I dare say the sound would be above the range of my hearing as well as my understanding.

Last night after I brought the cot in and was about to finish my puttering bachelor supper, she climbed to the edge of the box and pointed, first at herself and then at the top of the kitchen table. Afraid to let my vast hand take hold of her, I held it out flat and she sat in my palm. Camilla was inclined to fuss, but the angel looked over her shoulder and Camilla subsided, watchful but no longer alarmed.

The table-top is porcelain, and the angel shivered. I folded a towel and spread a silk handkerchief on top of that; the angel sat on this arrangement with apparent comfort, near my face. I was not even bewildered, without realizing why. That doesn't seem possible, does it? But there was a good reason.

She reached me first with visual imagery. How can I make it plain that this had nothing in common with my sleeping dreams? There was no weight of symbolism from my littered past, no discoverable connection with any of yesterday's commonplaces, indeed no actual involvement of my personality at all. I saw. I was moving vision, though without eyes or other flesh. And while my mind saw, it also knew where my flesh was, seated at the kitchen table. If anyone had entered the kitchen, if there had been a noise of alarm out in the henhouse, I should have known it.

THERE was a valley such as I have not seen, and never will, on Earth. I have seen many beautiful places on this planet—some of them were even tranquil. Once I took a slow steamer to New Zealand and had the Pacific as a plaything for many days. I can hardly say how I knew this was not Earth. The grass of the valley was a familiar green. A river below me was a blue and silver thread under sunlight. There were trees much like pine and maple, and maybe that is what they were. But it was not Earth. I was aware of mountains heaped to strange heights on either side of the valley—snow, rose, amber, gold. The amber tint was unlike any mountain color I have noticed in this world at midday.

Or I may have known it was not Earth, simply because her mind—dwelling within some unimaginable brain smaller than the tip of my little finger—told me so.

I watched two inhabitants of that world come flying, to rest in the field of sunny grass where my bodiless vision had brought me. Adult forms, such as my angel would surely be when she had her growth, except that both of these were male and one of them was dark-skinned. The latter was also old, with a thousand-wrinkled face, knowing and full of tranquillity; the other

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was flushed and lively with youth. Both were beautiful. The down of the brown-skinned old one was reddish-tawny; the other's was ivory with hints of orange. Their wings were true membranes, with more variety of subtle iridescence than I have seen even in the wings of a dragon-fly; I could not say that any color was dominant, for each motion brought a ripple of change.

These two sat at their ease on the grass. I realized that they were talking to each other, though their lips did not move in speech more than once or twice. They would nod, smile, now and then illustrate something with twinkling hands.

A huge rabbit lolloped past them. I knew—thanks to my own angel's efforts, I supposed—that this animal was of the same size as our common wild ones. Later a blue-green snake three times the size of the angels came flowing through the grass. The old one reached out to stroke its head carelessly, and I think he did it without interrupting whatever he was saying.

Another creature came in leisured leaps. He was monstrous, yet I felt no alarm in the angels or myself. Imagine a being built somewhat like a kangaroo up to the head, about eight feet tall, and katydid-green. Really the thick balancing tail and enormous legs were the only kangaroolike features about him. The body above the massive thighs was not dwarfed, but thick and square. The arms and hands were quite humanoid, and the head was round, manlike except for its face—there was only a single nostril and his mouth was set in the vertical. The eyes were large and mild.

I received an impression of high intelligence and natural gentleness.

In one of his manlike hands he carried two tools, so familiar and ordinary that I knew my body by the kitchen table had laughed in startled recognition. But after all, a garden spade and rake are basic. Once invented—I expect we did it ourselves in the Neolithic—there is little reason why they should change much down the millennia.

This farmer halted by the angels, and the three conversed a while. The big head nodded agreeably. I believe the young angel made a joke; certainly the convulsions in the huge green face made me think of laughter. Then this amiable monster turned up the grass in a patch a few yards square, broke the sod and raked the surface smooth, just as any competent gardener might do, except that he moved with the relaxed smoothness of a being whose strength far exceeds the requirements of his task . . .

I WAS back in my kitchen with everyday eyes. My angel was exploring the table. I had a loaf of bread there, and a dish of strawberries in cream. She was trying a breadcrumb, seemed to like it fair-

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ly well. I offered the strawberries. She broke off one of the seeds and nibbled it, but didn't care so much for the pulp. I held up the great spoon with sugary cream. She steadied it with both hands to try some. I think she liked it.

It had been stupid of me not to realize that she would be hungry. I brought wine from the cupboard; she watched inquiringly, so I put a couple of drops on the handle of a spoon. The taste really pleased her. She chuckled and patted her tiny stomach, though I'm afraid it wasn't very good sherry. I brought some crumbs of cake, but she indicated that she was full, came close to my face and motioned me to lower my head.

She reached up until she could press both hands against my forehead—I felt it only enough to know her hands were there—and she stood so a long time, trying to tell me something.

It was difficult. Pictures come through with relative ease, but now she was transmitting an abstraction of a complex kind. My clumsy brain suffered in the effort to receive. Something did come across, but I have only the crudest way of passing it on. Imagine an equilateral triangle; place the following words one at each corner—"recruiting," "collecting," "saving." The meaning she wanted to convey ought to be near the center of the triangle.

I had also the sense that her message provided a partial explanation of her errand in this lovable and damnable world.

She looked weary when she stood away from me. I put out my palm and she climbed into it, to be carried back to the nest.

She did not talk to me tonight, nor eat, but she gave a reason, coming out from Camilla's feathers long enough to turn her back and show me the wing-stubs. The protective sheaths have dropped off; the wings are rapidly growing. They are probably damp and weak. She was quite tired and went back into the warm darkness almost at once.

Camilla must be exhausted, too. I don't think she has been off the nest more than twice since I brought them into the house.

June 4

TODAY she can fly.

I learned it in the afternoon, when I was fiddling about in the garden and Judy was loafing in the sunshine she loves. Something apart from sight and sound called me to hurry back to the house. I saw my angel through the screen door before I opened it. One of her feet had caught in a hideous loop of loose wire at a break in the mesh. Her first tug of alarm must have tightened the loop so that her hands were not strong enough to force it open.

Fortunately I was able to cut the wire with a pair of shears before I lost my head; then she could free

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her foot without injury. Camilla had been frantic, rushing around fluffed up, but—here's an odd thing—perfectly silent. None of the recognized chicken-noises of dismay. If an ordinary chick had been in trouble, she would have raised the roof.

THE angel flew to me and hovered, pressing her hands on my forehead. The message was clear at once: "No harm done." She flew down to tell Camilla the same thing.

Yes, in the same way. I saw Camilla standing near my feet with her neck out and head low, and the angel put a hand on either side of her scraggy comb. Camilla relaxed, clucked in the normal way, and spread her wings for a shelter. The angel went under it, but only to oblige Camilla, I think—at least, she stuck her head through the wing feathers and winked.

She must have seen something else then, for she came out and flew back to me and touched a finger to my cheek, looked at the finger, saw it was wet, put it in her mouth, made a face, and laughed at me.

We went outdoors into the sun (Camilla, too) and the angel gave me an exhibition of what flying ought to be. Not even Wagner can speak of joy as her first free flying did. At one moment she would be hanging in front of my eyes, radiant and delighted; the next instant she would be a dot of color against a cloud. Try to imagine something that would make a hummingbird seem dull and sluggish!

They do hum. Softer than a hummingbird; louder than a dragonfly. Something like the sound of hawk-moths—*Hemaris thisbe,* for instance, the one I used to call Hummingbird Moth when I was a child.

I was frightened, naturally. Frightened first at what might happen to her, but that was unnecessary; I don't think she would be in danger from any savage animal except possibly Man. I saw a Cooper's hawk slant down the invisible toward the swirl of color where she was dancing by herself. Presently she was drawing iridescent rings around him. Then, while he soared in smaller circles, I could not see her, but (maybe she felt my fright) she was again in front of me, pressing my forehead in the now familiar way.

I knew she was amused, and caught the idea that the hawk was a "lazy character." Not quite the way I'd describe *Accipiter Cooperi,* but it's all in the point of view. I believe she had been riding his back, no doubt with her telepathic hands on his predatory head.

Later I was frightened by the thought that she might not want to return to me. Could I compete with sunlight and open sky? The passage of that terror through me brought her swiftly back, and her hands

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said with great clarity: "Don't ever be afraid of anything. It isn't necessary for you."

Once this afternoon I was saddened by the realization that old Judy can take little part in what goes on now. I can well remember Judy running like the wind. The angel must have heard this thought in me, for she stood a long time beside Judy's drowsy head, while Judy's tail thumped cheerfully on the warm grass . . .

IN THE evening the angel made a heavy meal on two or three cake crumbs and another drop of sherry, and we had what was almost a sustained conversation. I will write it in that form this time, rather than grope for anything more exact.

I asked her: "How far away is your home?"

"My home is here."

"I meant the place your people came from."

"Ten light years."

"The images you showed me—that quiet valley—that is ten light years away?"

"Yes. But that was my father talking to you, through me. He was grown when the journey began. He is two hundred and forty years old—our years, thirty-two days longer than each of yours."

Mainly I was conscious of a flood of relief. I had feared, on the basis of terrestrial biology, that her explosively rapid growth after hatching must foretell a brief life. But it's all right—she can outlive me, and by a few hundred years at that.

"Your father is here now, on this planet? Shall I see him?"

She took her hands away—listening, I believe. The answer was: "No. He is sorry. He is ill and cannot live long. I am to see him in a few days, when I fly a little better. He taught me for twenty years after I was born."

"I don't understand. I thought that—"

"Later, friend. My father is grateful for your kindness to me."

I don't know what I thought about that. I felt no faintest trace of condescension in the message.

"And he was showing me things he had seen with his own eyes, ten light years away?"

"Yes." Then she wanted me to rest a while; I am sure she knows what a huge effort it is for my primitive brain to function in this way. But before she ended the conversation by humming down to her nest she gave me this, and I received it with such clarity that I cannot be mistaken: "He says that only fifty million years ago it was a jungle there, just as Terra is now."

June 8

WHEN I woke four days ago, the angel was having breakfast, and little Camilla was dead. The angel watched me rub sleep

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out of my eyes, watched me discover Camilla, and then flew to me.

I received this: "Does it make you unhappy?"

"I don't know exactly." You can get fond of a hen, especially a cantankerous and homely old one whose personality has a lot in common with your own.

"She was old. She wanted a flock of chicks, and I couldn't stay with her. So I—" something obscure here; probably my mind was trying too hard to grasp it—"so I saved her life." I could make nothing else out of it. She said, "saved."

Camilla's death looked natural, except that I should have expected the death contractions to muss the straw and that hadn't happened. Maybe the angel had arranged the old lady's body for decorum, though I don't see how her muscular strength would have been equal to it, Camilla weighed at least seven pounds.

As I was burying her at the edge of the garden and the angel was humming over my head, I recalled a thing which, when it happened, I had dismissed as a dream. Merely a moonlight image of the angel standing in the nest box with her hands on Camilla's head, then pressing her mouth gently on Camilla's throat, just before the hen's head sank down out of my line of vision. Probably I actually awoke and saw it happen. I am somehow unconcerned—even, as I think more about it, pleased.

After the burial the angel's hands said: "Sit on the grass and we'll talk. Question me; I'll tell you what I can. My father asks you to write it down."

So that is what we have been doing for the last four days. I have been going to school, a slow but willing pupil. Rather than enter anything in this journal, for in the evenings I was exhausted, I made notes as best I could. The angel has gone now to see her father and will not return until morning. I shall try to make a readable version of my notes.

Since she had invited questions, I began with something which had been bothering me, as a would-be naturalist, exceedingly. I couldn't see how creatures no larger than the adults I had observed could lay eggs as large as Camilla's. Nor could I understand why, if they were hatched in an almost adult condition and able to eat a varied diet, she had any use for that ridiculous, lovely and apparently functional pair of breasts.

WHEN the angel grasped my difficulty, she exploded with laughter—her kind, which buzzed her all over the garden and caused her to fluff my hair on the wing and pinch my earlobe. She lit on a rhubarb leaf and gave a delectably naughty representation of herself as a hen laying an egg, including the cackle. She got me to bumbling helplessly—my kind of laughter—

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and it was some time before we could quiet down. Then she did her best to explain.

They are true mammals, and the young—not more than two or at most three in a lifetime averaging two hundred and fifty years—are delivered in very much the human way. The baby is nursed, human fashion, until his brain begins to respond a little to their unspoken language. That takes three to four weeks. Then he is placed in an altogether different medium.

She could not describe that clearly, because there was very little in my educational storehouse to help me grasp it. It is some gaseous medium which arrests bodily growth for an almost indefinite period, while mental growth continues. It took them, she says, about seven thousand years to perfect this technique after they first hit on the idea; they are never in a hurry.

The infant remains under this delicate and precise control for anywhere from fifteen to thirty years, the period depending not only on his mental vigor, but also on the type of lifework he tentatively elects as soon as his brain is knowing enough to make a choice. During this period his mind is guided with patience by teachers who—

IT SEEMS those teachers know their business. This was peculiarly difficult for me to assimilate, although the facts came through clearly enough. In their world, the profession of teacher is more highly honored than any other—can such a thing be possible?—and so difficult to enter that only the strongest minds dare to attempt it.

I had to rest a while after absorbing that.

An aspirant must spend fifty years, not including the period of infantile education, merely getting ready to begin, and the acquisition of factual knowledge, while not understressed, takes only a small proportion of those fifty years. Then, if he's good enough, he can take a small part in the elementary instruction of a few babies, and if he does well on that basis for another thirty or forty years, he is considered a fair beginner . . .

Once upon a time I myself lurched around stuffy classrooms, trying to insert a few predigested facts—I wonder how many of them *were* facts—into the minds of bored and preoccupied adolescents, some of whom may have liked me moderately well. I was even able to shake hands and be nice while their terribly well-meaning parents explained to me how they ought to be educated. So much of our human effort goes down the drain of futility, I sometimes wonder how we ever got as far as the Bronze Age. Somehow we did, though, and a short way beyond.

After that preliminary stage of an angel's education is finished, the baby is transferred to more ordinary surroundings, and his bodily

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growth completes itself in a very short time. Wings grow abruptly, as I have seen, and he reaches a maximum height of six inches by our measure. Only then does he enter on that lifetime of two hundred and fifty years, for not until then does his body begin to age. My angel has been a living personality for many years, but will not celebrate her first birthday for almost a year. I like to think of that.

At about the same time that they learned the principles of interplanetary travel, approximately twelve million years ago, these people also learned how growth could be rearrested at any point short of full maturity. At first the knowledge served no purpose except in the control of illnesses which still occasionally struck them at that time. But when the long periods of time required for space travel were considered, the advantages became obvious.

SO IT happens that my angel was born ten light years away. She was trained by her father and many others in the wisdom of seventy million years—that, she tells me, is the approximate sum of their *recorded* history—and then she was safely sealed and cherished in what my superamebic brain regarded as a blue egg. Education did not proceed at that time; her mind went to sleep with the rest of her. When Camilla's warmth made her wake and grow again, she remembered what to do with the little horny bumps provided for her elbows. And came out into this planet, God help her.

I wondered why her father should have chosen any combination so unreliable as an old hen and a human being. Surely he must have had plenty of excellent ways to bring the shell to the right temperature. Her answer should have satisfied me immensely, but I am still compelled to wonder about it:

"Camilla was a nice hen, and my father studied your mind while you were asleep. It was a bad landing, and much was broken—no such landing was ever made before after so long a journey. Only four other grown-ups could come with my father. Three of them died en route and he is very ill. And there were nine other children to care for."

Yes, I knew she'd said that an angel thought I was good enough to be trusted with his daughter. If it upsets me, all I need do is look at her and then in the mirror. As for the explanation, I can only conclude there must be more which I am not ready to understand. I was worried about those nine others, but she assured me they were all well, and I sensed that I ought not to ask more about them at present.

THEIR planet, she says, is closely similar to this, a trifle larger, moving in a somewhat longer orbit around a sun like ours. Two gleam-

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ing moons, smaller than ours—their orbits are such that two-moon nights come rarely; they are "magic," and she will ask her father to show me one, if he can. Because of a slower rotation, their day has twenty-six of our hours. Their atmosphere is mainly nitrogen and oxygen in the proportion familiar to us; slightly richer in some of the rare gases. The climate is now what we should call tropical and subtropical, but they have known glacial rigors like those in our world's past. There are only two great continental land masses, and many thousands of large islands.

Their total population is only five billion.

It seems my angel wants to become a student of animal life here on Earth. I, her teacher! But bless her for the notion anyhow. We sat and traded animals for a couple of hours last night; I found it restful, after the mental struggle to grasp more difficult matters. Judy was something new to her. They have several luscious monsters on that planet, but, in her view, so have we.

She told me of a blue sea-snake fifty feet long, relatively harmless, that bellows cowlike and comes into the tidal marshes to lay black eggs; so I gave her a whale. She offered a bat-winged, day-flying ball of mammalian fluff as big as my head and weighing under an ounce; I matched her with a marmoset. She tried me with a small-size pink brontosaur, very rare, but I was ready with the duck-billed platypus, and that caused us to exchange some pretty funny remarks about mammalian eggs. All trivial in a way; also the happiest evening in my fifty-three tangled years of life.

She was a trifle hesitant to explain those kangaroolike people, until she was sure I really wanted to know. It seems they are about the nearest parallel to human life on that planet; not a near parallel, of course, as she was careful to explain. Agreeable and always friendly souls, though they weren't always so, I'm sure, and of a somewhat more alert intelligence than we possess. Manual workers mainly, because they prefer it nowadays, but some of them are excellent mathematicians. The first practical spaceship was built by a group of them, with assistance, of course.

Names offer a difficulty. Because of the nature of the angelic language, they have scant use for them except for the purpose of written record, and writing naturally plays little part in their daily life—no occasion to write a letter when distance is no obstacle to the speech of your mind. An angel's formal name is about as important to him, as, say, my Social Security number is to me.

SHE has not told me hers, because my mind can't grasp the phonetics on which their written

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language is based. As we would speak a friend's name, an angel will project the friend's image to his friend's receiving mind. More pleasant and more intimate, I think, although it was a shock to me at first to glimpse my own ugly mug in my mind's eye.

Stories are occasionally written, if there is something in them that should be preserved precisely as it was in the first telling. But in their world the true story-teller has a more important place than the printer. He offers one of the best of their quieter pleasures; a good one can hold his audience for a week and never tire them.

"What is this 'angel' in your mind when you think of me?" she asked once.

"A being men have imagined for centuries, when they thought of themselves as they might like to be, and not as they are."

I did not try too painfully hard to learn much about the principles of space travel. The most my brain could take in of her explanation was something like: "Rocket, then phototropism." Now that makes scant sense. So far as I know, phototropism—movement toward light—is an *organic* phenomenon. One thinks of it as a response of protoplasm, in some plants and animal organisms, most of them simple, to the stimulus of light; certainly not as a force capable of moving inorganic matter.

I think that whatever may be the principle she was describing, this word phototropism was merely the nearest thing to it in my reservoir of language. If I did know the physical principles which brought them here, and could write them in terms accessible to technicians, I would not do it.

Here is a thing I am afraid no hypothetical reader of this journal would believe:

These people, as I have written, learned their method of space travel some twelve million years ago, yet this is the first time they have ever used it to convey them to another planet. The heavens are rich in worlds, she tells me; on many of them there is life, often on very primitive levels. No external force prevented her people from going forth, colonizing, conquering, as far as they pleased. They could have populated a whole Galaxy. They did not, because they believed they were not ready. More precisely—

Not good enough!

ONLY fifty million years ago, by her account, did they learn, as we may learn eventually, that intelligence without goodness is worse than high explosive in the hands of a baboon. For beings advanced beyond the level of Pithecanthropus, intelligence is a cheap commodity—not too hard to develop, hellishly easy to use for unconsidered ends. Whereas goodness is not to be achieved without un-

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ending effort of the hardest kind, within the self, whether the self be man or angel.

It is clear even to me that the conquest of evil is only one step, not the most important. Goodness, she tried to tell me, is an altogether positive quality; the part of living nature that swarms with such monstrosities as cruelty, meanness, bitterness, greed is not to be filled by a vacuum when these horrors are eliminated.

Kindness, for only one example. Anybody who defines kindness only as the absence of cruelty doesn't understand the nature of either.

THEY do not aim at perfection, these angels, only at the attainable. They passed through many millenia while advances in technology merely worsened their condition and increased the peril of self-annihilation. They came through that, in time. War was at length so far outgrown that its recurrence was impossible, and the development of wholly rational beings could begin. Then they were ready to start growing up, through more millenia of self-searching, self-discipline, seeking to earn the simple out of the complex, discovering how to use knowledge and not be used by it. Even then, of course, they slipped back often enough. There were what she refers to as eras of fatigue. In their dimmer past, they had had many dark ages, lost civilizations, hopeful beginnings ending in dust. Earlier still they had come out of the slime, as we did.

But their period of deepest uncertainty and sternest self-appraisal did not come until twelve million years ago, when they knew a Universe could be theirs for the taking, and knew they were not yet good enough.

They are in no more hurry than the stars. She tried to convey something, tentatively, at this point, which was really beyond both of us. It had to do with time (not as I understand time) being perhaps the most essential attribute of God (not as I was ever able to understand that word). Seeing my mental exhaustion, she gave up the effort, and later told me that the conception was extremely difficult for her, too—not only, I gathered, because of her youth and relative ignorance. There was also a hint that her father might not have wished her to bring my brain up to a hurdle like that one . . .

Of course they explored. Their little spaceships were roaming the ether before there was anything like man on Earth—roaming and listening, observing, recording; never entering nor taking part in the life of any home but their own. For five million years they even forbade themselves to go beyond their own solar system, though it would have been easy to do so. And in the following seven million years, although they traveled to in-

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credible distances, the same stern restraint was held in force.

It was altogether unrelated to what we should call fear. That, I think, is as extinct in them as hate. There was so much to do at home! I wish I could imagine it. They mapped the heavens, and played in their own sunlight.

Naturally I cannot tell you what goodness is. I know only, moderately well, what it seems to mean to us human beings. It appears that the best of us can, often with enormous difficulty, however, achieve a manner of life in which goodness somewhat overbalances our aggressive, hostile tendencies for the greater part of the time. We are, in other words, a fraction alive; the rest is in the dark. Dante was a bitter masochist; Beethoven a frantic and miserable snob, Shakespeare wrote potboilers. And Christ said: "My Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from me."

But give us fifty million years—I am no pessimist. After all, I've watched one-celled organisms on the slide, and listened to Brahms' Fourth. Night before last I said to the angel: "In spite of everything, you and I are kindred."

She granted me agreement.

June 9

SHE was lying on my pillow this morning so that I could see her when I awoke.

Her father has died, and she was with him when it happened. There was again that thought-impression which I could interpret only to mean that his life had been "saved." I was still sleep-bound when my mind asked: "What will you do?"

"Stay with you, if you wish it, for the rest of your life." The last part of the message was clouded, but I am familiar with that now. It seems to mean there is some further element which eludes me. I could not be mistaken about the part I did receive. It gives me amazing speculations. Being only fifty-three, I might live another thirty or forty years.

She was preoccupied this morning, but whatever she felt about her father's death that might be paralleled by sadness in a human being was hidden from me. She did say her father was sorry he had not been able to show me a two-moon night.

One adult, then, remains in this world. Except to say that he is two hundred years old and full of knowledge, and that he endured the long journey without serious ill effects, she has told me little about him. And there are ten children including herself.

Something was sparkling at her throat. When she was aware of my interest in it, she took it off and I fetched a magnifying glass. A necklace; under the glass, much like our finest human workmanship, if your imagination can reduce it to the

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proper scale. The stones appeared similar to the jewels we know; diamonds, sapphires, rubies, emeralds, the diamonds snapping out every color under heaven; but there were two or three very dark purple stones unlike anything I know—not amethysts, I am sure. The necklace was strung on something more slender than cobweb, and the design of the joining clasp was too delicate for my glass to help me. The necklace had been her mother's, she told me. As she put it back around her throat, I thought I saw the same shy pride that any human girl might feel in displaying a new pretty.

She wanted to show me other things she had brought, and flew to the table where she had left a sort of satchel an inch and a half long—quite a load for her to fly with, but the translucent substance is so light that when she rested the satchel on my finger I scarcely felt it. She arranged a few articles eagerly for my inspection, and I put the glass to work again.

One was a jeweled comb; she ran it through the down on her chest and legs to show me its use. There was a set of tools too small for the glass to interpret them; I learned later they were a sewing kit. A book, and some writing instrument much like a metal pencil. The book, I understand, is a blank record for her to use as needed.

And finally, when I was fully awake and dressed and we had finished breakfast, she reached in the bottom of the satchel for a parcel that was heavy for her and made me understand it was a gift for me. "My father made it for you, but I put in the stone myself, last night." She unwrapped it. A ring, precisely the size for my little finger.

I BROKE down somewhat. She understood that, and sat on my shoulder patting my earlobe till I had command of myself.

I have no idea what the jewel is. It shifts with the light from purple to jade green to amber. The metal resembles platinum in appearance, except for a tinge of rose at certain angles of light. When I stare into the stone, I think I see—never mind that now. I am not ready to write it down, and perhaps never will be, unless I am sure.

We improved our housekeeping, later in the morning. I showed her over the house. It isn't much—Cape Codder, two rooms up and two down. Every corner interested her, and when she found a shoebox in the bedroom closet, she asked for it. At her direction, I have arranged it on a chest near my bed and the window which shall be always open. She says the mosquitoes will not bother me, and I don't doubt her.

I unearthed a white silk scarf for the bottom of the box. After asking my permission—as if I could want to refuse her anything!—she got her sewing kit and snipped off

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a piece of the scarf several inches square, folded it on itself several times, and sewed it into a narrow pillow an inch long. So now she has a proper bed and a room of her own. I wish I had something less coarse than silk, but she insists she's pleased with it.

We have not talked very much today. In the afternoon she flew out for an hour's play in the cloud-country. When she returned, she let me know that she needed a long sleep. She is still sleeping, I think. I am writing this downstairs, fearing the light might disturb her.

Is it possible I can have thirty or forty years in her company? I wonder how teachable my mind still is. I seem to be able to assimilate new facts as well as I ever could; this ungainly carcass should be durable, with reasonable care. Of course, facts without a synthesizing imagination are no better than scattered bricks, but perhaps my imagination—

I don't know.

Judy wants out. I shall turn in when she comes back. I wonder if poor Judy's life could be—the word is certainly "saved." I must ask.

June 10

LAST night when I stopped writing I did go to bed, but I was restless, refusing sleep. At some time in the small hours—there was light from a single moon—she flew over to me. The tensions dissolved away like an illness and my mind was able to respond with a certain calm.

I made plain that I would never willingly part company with her, which I am sure she already knew, and she gave me to understand that there are two alternatives for the remainder of my life. The choice, she says, is altogether mine, and I must take time to be sure of my decision.

I can live out my natural span, whatever it proves to be, and she will not leave me for long at any time. She will be there to advise, teach, help me in anything good I care to undertake. She says she would enjoy this; for some reason she is, as we'd say in our language, fond of me.

Lord, the books I could write! I fumble for words now, in the usual human way. Whatever I put on paper is a miserable fraction of the potential; the words themselves are rarely the right ones. But under her guidance—

I could take a fair part in shaking the world. With words alone. I could preach to my own people. Before long, I would be heard.

I could study and explore. What small nibblings we have made at the sum of available knowledge! Suppose I brought in one leaf from outdoors, or one common little bug—in a few hours of studying it with her, I'd know more of my own specialty than a flood of the best textbooks could tell me.

She has also let me know that

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when she and those who came with her have learned a little more about humanity, it should be possible to improve my health greatly, and probably my life expectancy. I don't imagine my back could ever straighten, but she thinks the pain might be cleared away, entirely without drugs. I could have a clearer mind, in a body that would neither fail nor torment me.

Then there is the other alternative.

It seems they have developed a technique by means of which any unresisting living subject, whose brain is capable of memory at all, can experience *total recall*. It is a by-product, I understand, of their silent speech, and a very recent one. They have practiced it for only a few thousand years, and since their own understanding of the phenomenon is very incomplete, they classify it among their experimental techniques.

In a general way, it may somewhat resemble that reliving of the past which psychoanalysis can sometimes bring about in a limited way for therapeutic purposes. But you must imagine that sort of thing tremendously magnified and clarified, capable of including every detail which has ever registered on the subject's brain.

THE purpose is not therapeutic, as we would understand it; quite the opposite. The end result is—death.

Whatever is recalled by this process is transmitted to the receiving mind, which can retain it, and record any or all of it, if such a record is desired; but to the subject who recalls, it is a flowing away, without return. Thus it is not a true "remembering," but a giving. The mind is swept clear, naked of all its past, and, along with memory, life withdraws also. Very quietly.

At the end, I suppose it must be like standing without resistance in the engulfment of a flood tide, until finally the waters close over.

That, it seems, is how Camilla's life was "saved." When I finally grasped that, I laughed; and the angel of course caught the reason. I was thinking about my neighbor Steele, who boarded Camilla for me in his henhouse for a couple of winters.

Somewhere safe in the angelic records there must be a hen's-eye image of the patch in the seat of Steele's pants. And naturally Camilla's view of me too; not too unkind, I hope. She couldn't help the expression on her rigid little face, and I don't believe it ever meant anything.

At the other end of the scale is the saved life of my angel's father. Recall can be a long process, she says, depending on the intricacy and richness of the mind recalling; and in all but the last stages it can be halted at will. Her father's recall was begun when they were still far

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out in space and he knew that he could not long survive the journey.

When that journey ended, the recall had progressed so far that very little actual memory remained to him of his life on that other planet. He had what must be called a deductive memory—from the material of the years not yet given away, he could reconstruct what must have been, and I assume the other adult who survived the passage must have been able to shelter him from errors that loss of memory might involve. This, I infer, is why he could not show me a two-moon night.

I forgot to ask her whether the images he did send me were from actual or deductive memory. Deductive, I think, for there was a certain dimness about them not present when my angel gives me a picture of something seen with her own eyes.

Jade-green eyes, by the way.. Were you wondering?

In the same fashion, my own life could be saved. Every aspect of existence that I ever touched, that ever touched me, could be transmitted to some perfect record—the nature of the written record is beyond me, but I have no doubt of its relative perfection. Nothing important, good or bad, would be lost. And they need a knowledge of humanity, if they are to carry out whatever it is they have in mind.

It would be difficult, she tells me, and sometimes painful. Most of the effort would be hers, but some of it would have to be mine. In her period of infantile education, she elected what we should call zoology as her life work; for that reason she was given intensive theoretical training in this technique. Right now I guess she knows more than anyone else on this planet not only about what makes a hen tick, but how it feels to be a hen.

Though a beginner, she is in all essentials already an expert. She can help me, she thinks, if I choose this alternative. At any rate, she could ease me over the toughest spots, keep my courage from flagging.

For it seems that this process of recall is painful to an advanced intellect—without condescension, she calls us very advanced—because, while all pretense and self-delusion are stripped away, there remains conscience, still functioning by whatever standards of good and bad the individual has developed in his lifetime. Our present knowledge of our own motives is such a pathetically small beginning! Hardly stronger than an infant's first effort to focus his eyes.

I AM merely wondering how much of my life, if I choose this way, will seem to me altogether hideous. Certainly plenty of the "good deeds" which I still cherish in memory like so many well-behaved cherubs will turn up with the leering aspect of greed or petty vanity or worse.

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Not that I am a bad man, in any reasonable sense of the term. I respect myself; no occasion to grovel and beat my chest. I'm not ashamed to stand comparison with any other fair sample of the species. But there you are: I *am* human, and under the aspect of eternity so far, plus this afternoon's newspaper, that is a rather serious thing.

Without real knowledge, I think of this total recall as something like a passage down a corridor of a myriad images, now dark, now brilliant, now pleasant, now horrible—guided by no certainty except an awareness of the open blind door at the end of it. It could have its pleasing moments and its consolations. I don't see how it could ever approximate the delight and satisfaction of living a few more years in this world with the angel lighting on my shoulder when she wishes, and talking to me.

I had to ask her how great a value such a record would be to them. Obvious enough—they can be of little use to us, by their standards, until they understand us, and they came here to be of use to us as well as to themselves. And understanding us, to them, means knowing us inside out with a completeness such as our most dedicated and laborious scholars could never imagine. I remember, about those twelve million years: they will not touch us until they are certain no harm will come of it.

On our tortured planet, however, there is a time factor. They know that well enough, of course . . .

Recall cannot begin unless the subject is willing or unresisting; to them, that has to mean willing, for any being with intellect enough to make a considered choice. Now, I wonder how many they could find who would be honestly willing to make that uneasy journey into death, for no reward except an assurance that they were serving their own kind and the angels.

More to the point, I wonder if I would be able to achieve such willingness myself, even with her help.

When this had been explained to me, she urged me again to make no hasty decision. And she pointed out to me what my thoughts were already groping at—why not both alternatives, within a reasonable limit of time? Why couldn't I have ten or fifteen years or more with her, and then undertake the total recall, perhaps not until my physical powers had started toward senility? I thought that over.

This morning I had almost decided to choose that most welcome and comfortable solution. Then my daily paper was delivered. Not that I needed any such reminder.

IN THE afternoon I asked her if she knew whether, in the present state of human technology, it would be possible for our folly to actually destroy this planet. She did not know, for certain. Three of the other children have gone away to

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different parts of the world, to learn what they can about that. But she had to tell me that such a thing has happened before, elsewhere in the Universe. I guess I won't write a letter to the papers advancing an explanation for the occasional appearance of a nova among the stars. Doubtless others have hit on the same hypothesis without the aid of angels.

And that is not all I must consider. I could die by accident or sudden disease before I had begun to give my life.

Only now, at this very late moment, rubbing my sweaty forehead and gazing into the lights of that wonderful ring, have I been able to put together some obvious facts in the required synthesis.

I don't know, of course, what forms their assistance to us will take. I suspect human beings won't see or hear much of the angels for a long time to come. Now and then disastrous decisions may be altered, and those who believe themselves wholly responsible won't realize why their minds worked that way. Here and there, maybe an influential mind will be rather strangely nudged into a better course. Something like that. There may be new discoveries and inventions of kinds that will tend to neutralize the menace of our nastiest playthings.

But whatever the angels decide to do, the record and analysis of my fairly typical life will be an aid. It could even be the small weight deciding the balance between triumph and failure. That is Fact One.

Two: my angel and her brothers and sisters, for all their amazing level of advancement, are also of perishable protoplasm. Therefore, if this ball of mud becomes a ball of flame, they also will be destroyed. Even if they have the means to use their spaceship again or to build another, it might easily happen that they would not learn their danger in time to escape. And for all I know, this could be tomorrow. Or tonight.

So there can no longer be any doubt as to my choice, and I will tell her when she wakes.

July 9

TONIGHT* there is no recall; I am to rest a while. I see it is almost a month since I last wrote in this journal. My total recall began three weeks ago, and already the first twenty-eight years of my life have been saved.

It was a week after I told the angel my decision before she was prepared to start the recall. During that week she searched my present mind more closely than I should have imagined was possible: she had to be sure.

*At this point Dr. Bannerman's handwriting alters curiously. From here on he used a soft pencil instead of a pen, and the script shows signs of haste. In spite of this, however, it is actually much clearer, steadier and easier to read than the earlier entries in his normal hand.—BLAINE

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During that week of hard questions, I dare say she learned more about my kind than has ever gone on record even in a physician's office; I hope she did. To any psychiatrist who might question that, I offer a naturalist's suggestion. It is easy to imagine, after some laborious time, that we have noticed everything a given patch of ground can show us. But alter the viewpoint only a little—dig down a foot with a spade, say, or climb a tree-branch and look downward—it's a whole new world.

When the angel was not exploring me in this fashion, she took pains to make me glimpse the satisfactions and million rewarding experiences I might have if I chose the other way. I see how necessary that was; at the time it seemed almost cruel. She had to do it, for my own sake, and I am glad that I was somehow able to stand fast to my original choice. So was she, in the end; she has even said she loves me for it. What that troubling word means to her is not within my mind. I am satisfied to take it in the human sense.

Since I no longer require normal sleep, the recall begins at night, as soon as the lights begin to go out in the village and there is little danger of interruption. Daytimes, I putter about in my usual fashion. I have sold Steele my hens, and Judy's life was saved a week ago. That practically winds up my affairs, except that I went to write a codicil to my will. I might as well do that now, right here in this journal, instead of bothering my lawyer. It should be legal.

> To Whom It May Concern:
> I hereby bequeath to my friend Lester Morse, M.D., of Augusta, Maine, the ring which will be found at my death on the fifth finger of my left hand. I would urge Dr. Morse to retain this ring in his private possession at all times, and to make provision for its disposal, in the event of his own death, to some person in whose character he places the utmost faith.
> (Signed) David Bannerman*

Tonight she has gone away for a while, and I am to rest and do as I please till she returns. I shall spend the time filling in some blanks in this record, but I am afraid it will be a spotty job, because there is so much I no longer care about.

EXCEPT for the lack of desire for sleep, and a bodily weariness which is not at all unpleasant, I notice no physical effects thus far. I have no faintest recollection of anything that happened earlier than my twenty-eighth birthday. My deductive memory seems rather efficient, and I am sure I could recon-

*In spite of superficial changes in the handwriting, this signature has been certified genuine by an expert graphologist.—BLAINE

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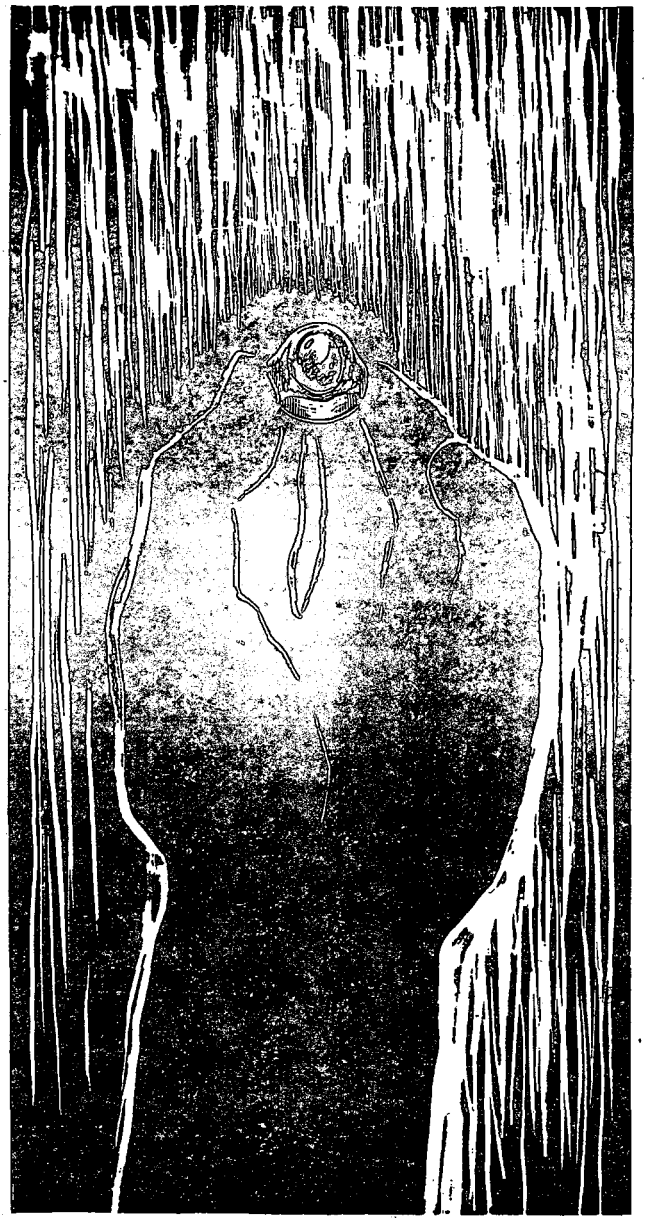

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struct most of the story if it were worth the bother. This afternoon I grubbed around among some old letters of that period, but they weren't very interesting.

My knowledge of English is unaffected; I can still read scientific German and some French, because I had occasion to use those languages fairly often after I was twenty-eight. The scraps of Latin dating from high school are gone. So are algebra and all but the simplest proposition of high school geometry: I never needed them.

I CAN remember thinking of my mother after twenty-eight, but I do not know whether the image this provides really resembles her. My father died when I was thirty-one, so I remember him as a sick old man. I believe I had a younger brother, but he must have died in childhood.*

Judy's passing was tranquil—pleasant for her, I think. It took the better part of a day. We went out to an abandoned field I know, and she lay blinking in the sunshine with the angel sitting by her, while I dug a grave and then rambled off after wild raspberries. Toward evening the angel came and told me I could bury Judy—it was finished. And most interesting, she said. I don't see how there can have been anything distressing about it for Judy. After all, what hurts us worst is to have our favorite self-deceptions stripped away, and I don't think Judy had any.

I have not found the recall painful, at least not in retrospect. There must have been sharp moments, mercifully forgotten along with their causes, as if the process had gone on under anesthesia. Certainly there were plenty of incidents in my first twenty-eight years which I should not care to offer to the understanding of any but the angels. Quite often I must have been mean, selfish, base in any number of ways, if only to judge by the record since twenty-eight. Those old letters touch on a few of these things. To me, they now matter only as material for a record which is safely out of my hands.

However, to any person I may have harmed, I wish to say this: you were hurt by aspects of my humanity which may not, in a few million years, be quite so common among us. Against these darker elements I struggled, in my human fashion, as you do yourselves. The effort is not wasted.

One evening—I think it was June 12—Lester dropped around for sherry and chess. Hadn't seen him in quite a while, and haven't since. There is a moderate polio scare this summer and it keeps him on the jump.

The angel retired behind some books on an upper shelf—I'm afraid it was dusty—and had fun

*Dr. Bannerman's mother died in 1918 of influenza. His brother (three years older, not younger) died of pneumonia, 1906.—BLAINE

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with our chess. She had a fair view of your bald spot, Lester. Later she remarked that she liked your looks, but can't you do something about that weight? She suggested an odd expedient, which I believe has occurred to your medical self from time to time—eating less.

Maybe she shouldn't have done what she did with those chess games. Nothing more than my usual blundering happened until after my first ten moves; by that time I suppose she had absorbed the principles, and she took over. I was not fully aware of it until I saw you looking like a boiled duck. I had imagined my astonishing moves were the result of my own damn cleverness.

SERIOUSLY, Lester, think back to that evening. You've played in stiff amateur tournaments; you know your own abilities and you know mine. Ask yourself whether I could have done anything like that without help. I tell you again I didn't study the game in the interval when you weren't here. I've never even had a chess book in the library, and if I had, no amount of study would take me into your class. I haven't that sort of mentality; just your humble sparring partner, and I've enjoyed it on that basis, as you might enjoy watching a prima donna surgeon pull off some miracle you wouldn't dream of attempting yourself. Even if your game had been away below par that evening, and I don't think it was, I could never have pinned your ears back three times running, without help. That evening you were a long way out of *your* class, that's all.

I couldn't tell you anything about it at the time—she was clear on that point—so I could only bumble and preen myself and leave you mystified. But she wants me to write anything I choose in this journal, and somehow, Lester, I think you may find the next few decades pretty interesting. You're still young, some ten years younger than I. I think you'll see many things that I wish I might see come to pass—or I would so wish if I were not convinced that my choice was the right one.

Most of those new events will not be spectacular, I'd guess. Many of the turns to a better way will hardly be recognized at the time for what they are, by you or anyone else. Obviously, our nature being what it is, we shall not change overnight. To hope for that would be as absurd as it is to imagine that any formula, ideology, theory of social pattern can bring us into Utopia. As I see it, Lester—and I think your consulting room would have told you the same even if your own intuition were not enough—there is only one battle of importance: Armageddon. And Armageddon field is within each individual.

At the moment I believe I am the happiest man who ever lived.

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July 20

ALL but the last ten years are now given away. The physical fatigue, though still pleasant, is quite overwhelming. I am not troubled by the weeds in my garden patch—merely a different sort of flowers where I had planned something else. An hour ago she brought me the seed of a blown dandelion, to show me how lovely it was. I don't suppose I had ever noticed. I hope whoever takes over this place will bring it back to farming; they say the ten acres below the house used to be good potato land, nice early ground.

It is delightful to sit in the sun, as if I were old.

After thumbing over earlier entries in this journal, I see I have often felt quite bitter toward my own kind. I deduce that I must have been a lonely man, with much of the loneliness self-imposed. A great part of my bitterness must have been no more than one ugly by-product of a life spent too much apart. Some of it doubtless came from objective causes, yet I don't believe I ever had more cause than any moderately intelligent man who would like to see his world a pleasanter place than it has been. My angel tells me that the scar on my back is due to an injury received in some early stage of the war that still goes on. That could have soured me, perhaps. It's all right; it's in the record.

She is racing with a hummingbird—holding back, I think, to give the swift little green fluff a break.

ANOTHER note for you, Lester. I have already indicated my ring is to be yours. I don't want to tell you what I have discovered of its properties, for fear it might not give you the same pleasure and interest that it has given me. Of course, like any spot of shifting light and color, it is an aid to self-hypnosis. It is more, much more than that, but—find out for yourself, at some time when you are a little protected from everyday distractions.

I know it can't harm you, because I know its source.

By the way, I wish you would convey to my publishers my request that they either discontinue printing my *Introductory Biology* or else bring out a new edition revised in accordance with some notes you will find in the top left drawer of my library desk. I glanced through that book after my angel assured me that I wrote it, and I was amazed. However, I'm afraid my notes are messy—I call them mine by a poetic license—and they may be too advanced for the present day, though the revision is mainly a matter of leaving out certain generalities that aren't so. Use your best judgment. It's a very minor textbook, and the thing isn't too important.

A last wriggle of my vanishing personal vanity.

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July 27

I HAVE seen a two-moon night. It was given to me by that remaining grown-up, at the end of a wonderful visit, when he and six of those nine other children came to see me. It was last night, I think—yes, must have been. First there was a murmur of wings above the house; my angel flew in laughing. Then they were here, all about me, full of gaiety and colored fire, showing off in every way they knew would please me. Each one had something graceful and friendly to say to me. One brought me a moving image of the St. Lawrence seen at morning from half a mile up—clouds, eagles—now how could he know that would delight me so much?

And each one thanked me for what I had done.

But it's been so easy!

And at the end the old one—his skin is quite black, and his down is white and gray—gave the remembered image of a two-moon night. He saw it some sixty years ago.

I have not even considered making an effort to describe it. My fingers will not hold this pencil much longer tonight. Oh, soaring buildings of white and amber, untroubled countryside, silver on curling rivers, a glimpse of open sea. A moon rising in clarity, another setting in a wreath of cloud, between them a wide wandering of unfamiliar stars. Here and there the angels, worthy after fifty million years to live in such night.

No, I cannot describe anything like that. But you human kindred of mine, I can do something better. I can tell you that this two-moon night, glorious as it was, was no more beautiful than a night under a single moon on this ancient and familiar Earth might be—if you will imagine that human evil has been cleared away, and that our own people have started at last on the greatest of all explorations, themselves.

July 29

NOTHING now remains to give away but the memory of the time that has passed since the angel came. I am to rest as long as I wish, write whatever I want. Then I shall get myself over to the bed and lie down as if for sleep. She tells me that I can keep my eyes open; she will close them for me when I no longer see her.

I remain convinced that our human case is hopeful. I feel sure that in only a few thousand years we may be able to perform some of the simpler preparatory tasks, such as casting out evil and loving our neighbors. And if that should prove to be so, who can doubt that in another few million years, or even less, we might be only a little lower than the angels?

* * *

LIBRARIAN'S NOTE: As is

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generally known, the original of the *Bannerman Journal* is said to have been in the possession of Dr. Lester Morse at the time of the latter's disappearance in 1964, and that disappearance has remained an unsolved mystery to the present day. McCarran is known to have visited Capt. Garrison Blaine in October, 1951, but no record remains of that visit. Capt. Blaine appears to have been a bachelor who lived alone. He was killed in line of duty, December, 1951. McCarran is believed not to have written about nor discussed the Bannerman affair with anyone else. It is almost certain that he himself removed the extract and related papers from the files—unofficially, it would seem—when he severed his connection with the FBI in 1957. At any rate, they were found among his effects after his assassination, and were released to the public, considerably later, by Mrs. McCarran.

The following memorandum was originally attached to the extract from the *Bannerman Journal*. It carries the McCarran initialing.

Aug. 11, 1951

The original letter of complaint written by Stephen Clyde, M.D., and mentioned in the accompanying letter of Captain Blaine, has unfortunately been lost, owing perhaps to an error in filing.

Personnel presumed responsible have been instructed not to allow such error to be repeated except if, as and/or when necessary.

C.McC.

On the margin of this memorandum there was a penciled notation, later erased. Iodine vapor has been used to bring out the unmistakable McCarran script. The notation read in part as follows: *Far be it from a McC. to lose his job except if, as and or*—the rest is undecipherable, except for a terminal word which is regrettably unparliamentary.

* * *

STATEMENT BY LESTER MORSE, M.D. DATED AUGUST 9, 1951

On the afternoon of July 30, 1951, acting on what I am obliged to describe as an unexpected impulse, I drove out to the country for the purpose of calling on my friend Dr. David Bannerman. I had not seen him nor had word from him since the evening of June 12 of this year, 1951.

AFTER knocking, calling to him and hearing no response, I went upstairs to his bedroom and found him dead. From superficial indications I judged that death must have taken place during the previous night. He was lying on his bed on his left side, comfortably

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disposed as if for sleep, but fully dressed, with a fresh shirt and clean summer slacks. His eyes and mouth were closed, and there was no trace of the disorder to be expected at even the easiest death.

BECAUSE of these signs I assumed, soon as I had determined the absence of breath and heartbeat and noted the chill of the body, that some neighbor must have already found him, performed these simple rites of respect for him, and probably notified a local physician or other responsible person. I therefore waited, Dr. Bannerman had no telephone, expecting that someone would soon call.

Dr. Bannerman's journal was on a table near his bed, open to that page on which he had written a codicil to his will. I read that part. Later, while I was waiting for others to come, I read the remainder of the journal, as he apparently wished me to do. The ring he mentions was on the fifth finger of his left hand, and it is now in my possession.

When writing that codicil, Dr. Bannerman must have overlooked or forgotten the fact that in his formal will, written some months earlier, he had appointed me executor. If there are legal technicalities involved, I shall be pleased to cooperate fully with the proper authorities.

The ring, however, will remain in my keeping, since that was Dr. Bannerman's expressed wish, and I am not prepared to offer it for examination or discussion under any circumstances.

The notes for a revision of one of his textbooks were in his desk, as indicated in the journal. They are by no means "messy," nor are they particularly revolutionary except in so far as he wished to rephrase, as theory or hypothesis, certain statements which I would have regarded as axiomatic. This is not my field, and I am not competent to judge. I shall take up the matter with his publishers at the earliest opportunity.*

So far as I can determine, and bearing in mind the results of the autopsy performed by Stephen Clyde, M.D., the death of Dr. David Bannerman was not inconsistent with the presence of an embolism of some type not distinguishable on post mortem. I have so stated on the certificate of death. I am compelled to add one other item of medical opinion for what it may be worth:

I am not a psychiatrist, but, owing to the demands of general practise, I have found it advisable to keep as up to date as possible with current findings and opinion in this branch of medicine. Dr. Bannerman possessed, in my opinion, emotional and intellectual stability

*LIBRARIAN'S NOTE: But it seems he never did. No new edition of "Introductory Biology" was ever brought out, and the textbook has been out of print since 1952.

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to a higher degree than anyone else of comparable intelligence in the entire field of my acquaintance, personal and professional.

IF IT is suggested that he was suffering from a hallucinatory psychosis, I can only say that it must have been of a type quite outside my experience and not described, so far as I know, anywhere in the literature of psychopathology.

Dr. Bannerman's house, on the afternoon of July 30, was in good order. Near the open, unscreened window of his bedroom there was a coverless shoebox with a folded silk scarf in the bottom. I found no pillow such as Dr. Bannerman describes in the journal, but observed that a small section had been cut from the scarf. In this box, and near it, there was a peculiar fragrance, faint, aromatic, very sweet, such as I have never encountered before and therefore cannot describe.

It may or may not have any bearing on the case that, while I remained in his house that afternoon, I felt no sense of grief or personal loss, although Dr. Bannerman had been a loved and honored friend for a number of years. I merely had, and have, a conviction that, after the completion of some very great undertaking, he had found peace.

The ring he bequeathed to me has confirmed that.

—EDGAR PANGBORN

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COVER ..... *by Willer*

NOVELETS

APPOINTMENT IN TOMORROW ..... *by Fritz Leiber*

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SHORT STORIES*

PEN PAL ..... *by Milton Lesser*

SYNDROME JOHNNY ..... *by Charles Dye*

ARTICLE*

THE METEORIC STREAM ..... *by Willy Ley*

BOOK-LENGTH SERIAL—Conclusion

MARS CHILD ..... *by Cyril Judd*

FEATURES

EDITOR'S PAGE

GALAXY'S FIVE STAR SHELF

***Short stories and article depend upon the space available. These two short stories have been squeezed out of previous issues, so they will be given top priority, unless, of course, they don't fit.**

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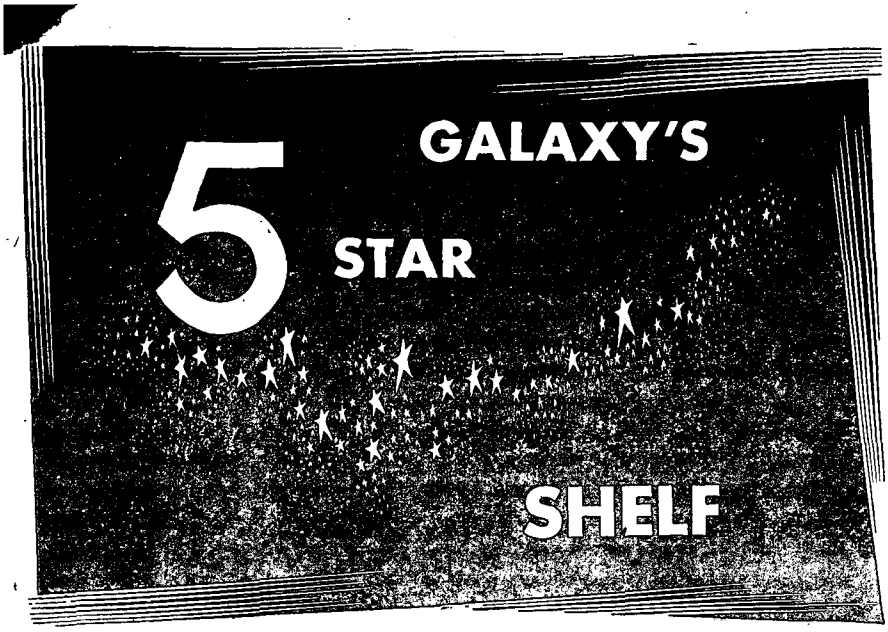

THE ILLUSTRATED MAN, by Ray Bradbury. Doubleday & Co., New York, N. Y., 1951. 252 *pages,* $2.75.

THIS is the cream off the top of the bottle. Besides writing some of the best short stories of any type being turned out in America today, Bradbury also (for which we may be particularly thankful) knows his own lemons and refuses to reprint them. As a result, we have an absolute must for every lover of science fiction, and also for those who want good short story writing, no matter what its genre.

This is a better book than *The Martian Chronicles*, which, because of its limited subject, had a tendency to tire. The new volume, on the other hand, is as varied as a rainbow. Horror stories to chill the blood—has anything more frightening ever been written than "Kaleidoscope" or "The Fox and the Forest," or anything as bitter and shuddery as "The Concrete Mixer?" Uncomfortable humor with a rapier twist, like "Marionettes, Inc." Trenchant stories with thought-bombs built in like "The Other Foot," that very tough sequel to "Way in the Middle of the Air" in *The Martian Chronicles*, or like "The Fire Balloons," which you must read to believe!

According to the record of copyright notices indicating previous magazine publication, some of the

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best of these stories have never before appeared in print. This is true of "The Other Foot," and of another chilling story of deep space called "No Particular Night or Morning." These originals alone would make the book a buy for anyone with a library budget.

It is true that there are those who don't go for Bradbury. They won't like this book any better than anything else he has done, for it bears all the stigmata of his so-called "eccentricities." For most readers, however, this is in its favor —for it means that here is someone whose prose is not die-cut like the styles of many of our modern crop of fiction writers, no matter what their subject. Bradbury is original, he is moving, he is colorful, he is rich in ideas. I don't know what else to ask of a writer of science fiction or anything else.

THE SKYLARK OF SPACE, by Edward E. Smith, Ph.D. F.F.F. Publishers, Brooklyn, N. Y., 1950. 245 pages, $3.00.

THIS ancient item, on the title page of which auctorial credit is shared with Mrs. Lee Hawkins Garby (about whom I, for one, would like to know more), was the first venture of the greatest of all the old-time space opera boys, the creator of *Space Hounds of the I.P.C.*, *The Grey Lensman*, and other equally famed and equally fancy derringdoes of the space lanes. The jacket blurb says *The Skylark of Space* was written before the first World War, though the earliest copyright date on the back of the title page is 1928. Further, according to this copyright page, the first book edition came out in 1946, the second in 1947, and the third (this one) in 1950. It seems that the early printings by another publisher were extremely small, so Julius Unger, who is hiding behind that "F.F.F." pseudonym, decided there still was a market for the book.

This tale is the sort of thing that only insatiable fans will enjoy, being, unlike E.E.'s later opera, uncommonly amateur and awkward —an excellent example of the truism that an author's first work usually deserves the wastebasket more than it does publication. There is, it is true, some interesting pseudo-science, including stuff on atomic power which, if it was originally written as it now appears, came pretty close to some of the actual facts.

But the Rover Boy style is just a little too ripe for these latter-day eyes, which have become accustomed to more genuine writing, and the rest of the pseudo-science is so much of the gee-whiz school that it hurts a little to read—like going through Sunday supplements. And, to continue the mixed metaphor, my ears are still red from the attempts at romance which Dr. Smith and his lady collaborator per-

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petrated in this tale. The general level of the story can best be indicated, perhaps, by the fact that the strongest oath these manly characters ever indulge in is "Great Cat!"

On the other hand, your honest reporter has to state that, despite all these cavils, he read the tale practically at a sitting (skipping ruthlessly, it must be added) since the plot does move—and, for the last half of the book, all over the Galaxy, at that . . . Plenty of action, if you pass up the goo and forget all about literary techniques as you're reading.

SOLUTION T-25, by Theodora Dubois. Doubleday & Co., New York, N. Y., 1951. 218 pages, $2.75.

THIS is the first dip into science fiction by a lady who is credited with nearly twenty mystery stories. Somehow one could wish that she had stayed with her first love, for she doesn't do too well by us in this attempt.

The story features an all-out atomic attack on the United States by the Russians, nearly complete destruction of all our cities, a callous and cruel dictatorship by the Communist masters, and their eventual defeat through the use of a mysterious new weapon, Solution T-25. I will not tip the author's hand as to the nature of this solution—which is telegraphed from the earlier parts of the book—except to hint that something very much like it was used with a reverse twist by John D. MacDonald in *Astounding* less than a year ago.

There is nothing particularly unsatisfactory about Miss DuBois' writing; it is as smooth and slick as soft butter. The idea of the United States being conquered by a sneak Communist attack is a usable one also, in view of the temper of today's thinking in this country, although somehow science fiction seems to lose much of its *zing* when it is put to political use. But the characterizations, both of the Americans and the Russians, are so astonishingly crude, and the involutions of the plot are so completely unreal and coincidental, that the book becomes a job to finish.

Miss DuBois' story inevitably forces comparison with the only other science fiction by a woman that Doubleday has published—Judith Merril's *Shadow on the Hearth*. This too was the story of an atom bombing, this time of New York alone, but what a difference! Miss Merril's book had no contrived plot, and the writing was not as slick as is Miss DuBois'. But her story was completely real, completely believable; it was peopled with painfully real and believable people. If I have to choose, I'll take good characterizations and a realistically rendered situation, and leave the melodrama and the buttery prose for others to read.

—GROFF CONKLIN

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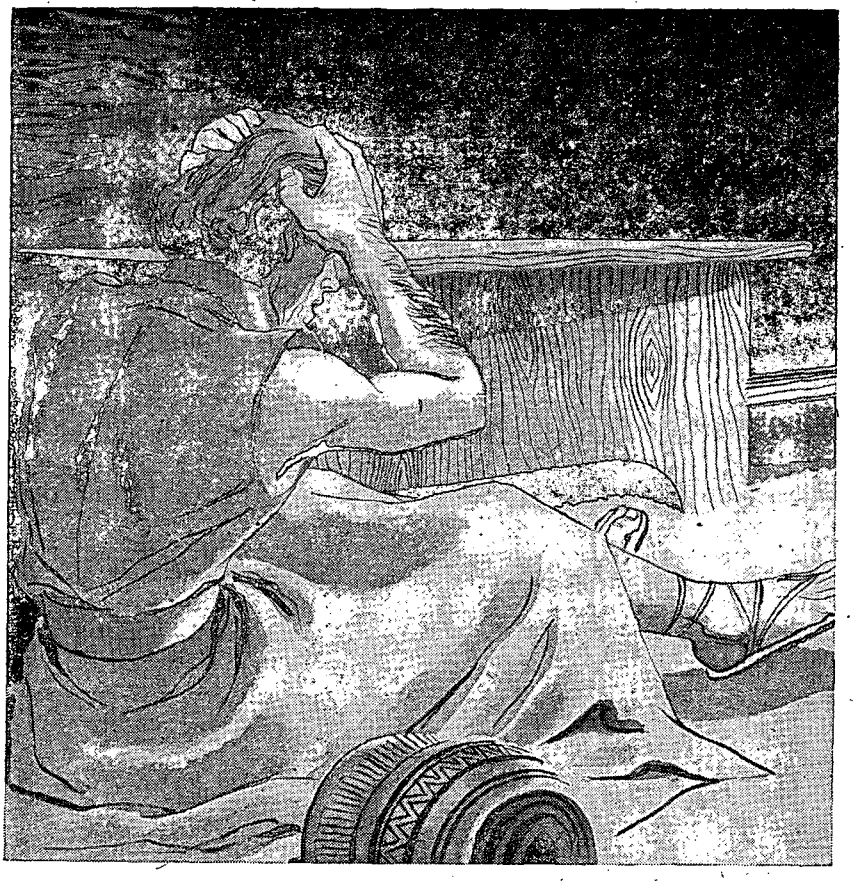
Don't Live in

BY DAMON KNIGHT



It was a ghastly accident: the most perfect civilization in all history was threatened—and so were its long-dead sacred founders!

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the Past

Illustrated by DAVID MAUS

I

BERNARD FRANCOIS PIET FU-TZE VARGAS had a clear and sustained feeling that there ought not to be days like this. Four of his wife's cousins from Callisto had descended upon him that morning at the ungodly hour of ten o'clock (they required special diets and were obscenely fat); he had been seated below a sub-assistant minister of finance at the High Commissioner's dinner last night, a manifest insult; the power beam had failed twice on his way into the office, over Sancisco and over the California Garbage Conversion Area; and he had a splitting headache.

Vargas was a youngish man with large, ruddy features now contorted into a heavy scowl. He sat half leaning across his desk, chin on his fist, moodily thrusting folded

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sheets of metal fiber into the automatic letter-opener.

Abruptly the ceiling light dimmed and something swatted him on the rump three times in machine-gun tempo, jarring him all the way up his spine. Vargas found himself canted across his desk with his head in an overturned flower vase. The lights flickered again, went out altogether; and in the brief interval before they went on again a fourth shock, more violent than the others, lifted Vargas all the way across his desk and onto the thick body-temperature carpet.

HE SAT up slowly, inarticulate with rage. It was at this moment that his assistant, Knut Everett Roku LaSalle Choong, chose to burst into the room. Choong was just as disheveled as his superior. He tripped over the doorsill, lurched wildly and brought up against Vargas' totem post, saving himself by clutching a white silk banner which carried the names and honors of two hundred and fifty-nine of Vargas' most distinguished ancestors.

Hanging dramatically from the banner, Choong bleated, "Chief! The pipelines have busted!"

Vargas' face, which had been flushed a moment before, took on a blotchy appearance. "What, all of them?" he whispered hoarsely.

"All," said Choong tragically. "We're right over a fault, you know. The quake must have snapped the pipelines like—like pipestems."

Vargas scrambled up and clutched the other man by the slack of his sunflower-colored robe. "Did they cut transmission?" he demanded.

"Yes, but—"

"How long before the flow stopped?"

"About two seconds, chief. Possibly a little more. I didn't stop to get the meter readings—"

"Don't interrupt me!" said Vargas in a restrained shout. He took a firmer grip and brought his pop-eyed face close to Choong. "*What was being transmitted?*"

"Flangs," said the assistant in a barely audible voice. He gulped. "Tweedledums. Collapsed flooring. Argo paste. Rozzers. And—and—"

Vargas had been puffing heavily. Now he held his breath for an instant. "Well?"

"And mangels," said Choong in terror. "Three pipes of mangels."

Vargas collapsed on the floor and looked at Choong through his fingers. "Oh, Great Blodgett, no!"

"Yes."

"Mangels!"

Bedlam was growing in the outer offices. There were running footsteps, shouts, shrieks of dismay.

"Tweedledums are bad enough," said Vargas. "But mangels! We'll be excommunicated. They'll hang our totems upside down."

A red-faced man appeared in the doorway. His expression was not

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pleasant. Vargas scrambled to his feet and both he and Choong stood at attention.

"Two and five-sevenths seconds," the red-faced man remarked. "Not a very good response for trained monitors, is it? Too much Rhine beer the night before, perhaps? Or reading a tape—composing poetry? Catching a little nap? Or was it—?" He stopped, wincing, and looked at a white-metal doughnut strapped to his right wrist, above his ruffled sleeve. A tiny voice spoke at some length; Vargas could only catch the words "jackass" and "cretin."

"Yes, sir," said the red-faced man, whose name, for the record, was Wallace Hyacinth Manuel Chiang Llewellyn. He barked at Vargas, "Turn on the tri-D!"

Vargas stumbled over to his desk and obeyed. A five foot disc set into a low platform on his right glowed faintly, sparked and then spat a vertical stream of color. The image steadied and became the all too convincing three-dimensional replica of a portly man with a bulbous nose and long gray hair.

"Enlarge your image!" it said sharply.

Vargas jumped a foot and tremblingly adjusted the controls on his desk. The portly man frowned at them and said, "I happen to be Representative John Hsi Bright-Feather Wilson Woodcock, Chairman of the Committee to Investigate the San Juaquin Disaster, which was formed in emergency session five months ago. Now, are you all of the scoundrels who were immediately responsible for this outrageous dereliction of duty? If not, get the rest of 'em in here. We'll get to the bottom of this if it's the last—"

THE Chief Executive, His Honor Ibrahim L. Btandu Eriksson Dickey, frowned an executive frown. "Now let me get this straight," he said. "The goods are put into one end of the tube and they are turned into some kind of temporal flow?"

"That's it approximately, Your Honor." Representative Rowland Mokai DeJonge Baruch Schemkov, Chairman of the Plenary Committee which had replaced Representative Woodcock's Emergency Committee (Woodcock having been impeached) glanced at a few notes in his palm. He had briefed himself thoroughly.

"In transit, Your Honor, the goods are in a special state of matter, in which they are partially out of our frame of spacio-temporal reference, and are carried along by the universal drift, thus apparently bypassing the laws of inertia and conservation of energy. We apply no force once they enter the tube; that's why tube transport is so cheap.

"Moreover, the size and shape of the goods to be transported make no difference, since the spacial co-

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ordinates are not fixed with reference to normal space. You might say that the net result is the same as if you had melted everything down to a kind of thin mush. This, of course, is done *before* the shipment is fed into the pipelines. I would not insult Your Honor's intelligence by explaining the method by which the shipments are moved out of our space-time, for it is too well known to need explaining.

"There is just enough contact between the two matter states so that the material being transported will not go through a solid of any thickness. In other words, we can lead the shipments anywhere in the world through a tube, even a very small one—the tubes we use are three-eighths inches in width. At the end of the tube, the expansion of the material releases it from the special state and it comes out in its original form, ready to be processed, stored, consumed or whatever."

"I see," commented the Chief. "That's all very well, Representative, but what I want to know is this. Just why were we caught with our robes up in this situation?"

Schemkov cleared his throat. "There appears," he admitted, "to have been some theoretical possibility of this happening all along. I have several abstracts, which I will turn over to your office, of articles and scientific papers in which reference is made to the possibility. It—"

THE Chief looked down his long nose in a manner which suggested that the Representative was not quite human. He said slowly and earnestly, "And this possibility was given no consideration when the transport tubes were built? Is that it?"

Representative Schemkov had been a member of the Subcommittee to Pass on Recommendations for the Erection of Chang-Wiley Transport Tubes, and he quaked in his sandals. "No safeguard was possible, Your Honor. What occurred was that the rupture in the lines took place at exactly the instant when that section of the planet was revolving directly opposite the line of universal drift—an event which astronomers assure me is very rare—and, in addition, I understand that the temporal displacement at that moment was exceptionally great. Under these conditions, the material released from the end of the tube did not reform normally, but was carried some distance back along the temporal line—"

"How far back? I mean *exactly*, not a guess."

"The mathematicians are still working on that, Your Honor, and the best they can say now is that it was probably somewhere between the mid-Twentieth Century and the late Twenty-First. However, there is a strong possibility that none of the material reached any enclosed space which would attract it, and that it may all have been dissipated

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harmlessly in the form of incongruent molecules."

"But those materials," said the Chief grimly, "included what?"

"Flangs," said Representative Schemkov, "and tweedledums, and collapsed flooring, and argo paste—"

"And *mangels,*" added the Chief. "Isn't that correct?"

"Yes, Your Honor."

"And you tell me that there is a possibility that these things did *not* suddenly appear in the homes and business places of persons of *Blodgett's own time—*" he touched his forelock, and Schemkov automatically did the same—"causing Blodgett knows how many neuroses, how many psychoses, how many lost contracts, how many broken homes—"

"But, Your Honor—"

"—and do you realize that if these things do appear in that era, the total course of our civilization might be altered? That we might today become a world of many warring nations instead of one? Of many races instead of one blended humanity? That the great man to whom we owe all this, Blodgett himself, might be—" he lowered his voice in horror—"destroyed by your carelessness? Do you realize that, Representative?"

Even the Chief was stunned by his own frightening suggestion, while Schemkov felt terror climbing his spine.

"No Blodgett?" Schemkov whispered. "You're—you're just saying that to scare me. It isn't—possible."

The Chief's face was rigid with fear. "It is. Blodgett was the greatest of our Sacred Ancestors, but he was superhuman in a human way, not supernatural. With all those ghastly things loose in his era, and —and mangels, especially . . ."

"Destroying any of our other Sacred Ancestors would be unthinkable enough," said Schemkov. "But Blodgett himself—!"

"This wonderful civilization he constructed entirely by the might of his incredible mind," the Chief added bitterly. "Gone."

"I'd have myself ritually beheaded," said Schemkov, "rather than live in any civilization Blodgett did not create."

"Representative, the men responsible for this catastrophe are going to be sorry they were ever born into the public service. We're going to get to the bottom of this, and when we do—"

"HERE'S what it boils down to," said the square man in the gray diamond-dusted robe with a non-objective dragon. He made a triangle with his hands on the desk-top. "The kick went all the way upstairs and now it's come all the way down again. Everybody in fifteen echelons has a sore tail, the blame has been passed around, and now you're it. That's all."

Ronald Mao Jean-Jacques von Hochbein Mazurin wore a slightly

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stunned expression on his normally cheerful, pug-nosed face. The face, up to now, had been his fortune; it bore a slight but perceptible resemblance to that of Blodgett, the Father of the World, as he appeared in early prints and paintings. Mazurin had learned to emphasize the resemblance by assuming a soulful look, once he discovered that it usually earned him the juicier and less messy jobs in the Bureau.

He said, "Now wait a minute. How do they know they can get me to the right time line with this new gimmick of theirs? Isn't that a contradiction in terms? If I'm in it, that's a new line, isn't it? I mean—"

"I know what you mean," said the square man. "Every displacement moves the observer to a new time line. But remember, you're not required to *do* anything once you get there; all you have to do is see what happened. As I understand it, you won't be attached to that time line at all; you'll just be partially in it, the same way stuff in a transport tube is partially in this line. You can't possibly affect anything that happens there. Therefore, from a mathematical point of view, you're not in it at all. You'll be able to see, because light quanta have binding extensions on either side of the plenum-line proper, but you can't influence anything that happens there."

Mazurin was feeling uncomfortable. "How do I get back?"

"Don't worry," said the square man impatiently. "You'll get back all right. You'll be at the end of a pencil of temporal energy all the time. That's what will be holding you in the partly-there state. After a few days, they'll send an impulse along it to bring you back. You'll have enough time to do the job properly, because if any of that stuff did come out where it would menace our Sacred Ancestors, it wouldn't have come out all at the same time or the same place. A difference of micro-seconds here could mean hours or days there."

"THEN that's why nothing happened to our civilization yet," Mazurin said. "The things probably haven't landed."

"It could be," the square man agreed worriedly. "Or it might not happen on this time line at all—the results of any change in the past could leave this one alone and affect only alternate futures."

"Do you really think it might?" asked Mazurin hopefully.

"No. Or maybe. How in hell would I know? All I'm supposed to discuss with you is sending you back to the past, to the time of Blodgett—" They touched their forelocks reverently—"At the end of a pencil of temporal energy, and that it'll bring you back okay in a few days."

"Sounds like deep-sea diving at the end of a piece of string," said

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Mazurin. "What happens if the power fails, or the contact is broken some other way?"

"Then I suppose you'd be stuck in that line—which would, of course, immediately become another line. Not that it matters. But you wouldn't be too badly off if that did happen, I'd say. That was a pretty interesting period, not too uncivilized, and you'd see a lot of action."

"Umm," said Mazurin. He rapidly calculated his chances of getting another job if he were discharged and blacklisted by the ICS Intelligence Bureau—zero. "All right, I'm your boy."

The square man came around the desk and patted his shoulder with a hand like a jeweled bunch of sausages. "Good man," he said emotionally. "I knew you'd come through, the Bureau knows how to pick 'em. Get your affairs wound up and report to the Physics Bureau at twelve o'clock tomorrow."

MAZURIN turned up in the white-tiled laboratory ten minutes late, with traces of lipstick still adhering to his right ear and exuding an enviable odor of good rice wine. In the interests of truth, it must be stated that he did not entirely absorb all the briefing he received before he was thrust unceremoniously into the temporal projection machine.

He retained a definite impression of the machine itself, which was of an unpleasant hollow-cube shape and emitted a disquieting hum, together with a sharp smell of ozone. He recollected that, once arrived at his destination, he would be able to walk about on any available surface, but unable to move any solid object or enter into any sort of communication with the inhabitants.

The breathing apparatus strapped over his mouth and nose was reminder enough that he was dependent upon his own air supply. He recalled being asked if he had been checked out in lip reading and Twentieth Century English, and of replying, with hurt dignity, that he most certainly had. Then there was some more talk, during which he had been distracted by a tendency of his knees to swivel sharply, and then he had been grasped by the nape of the neck and his heels and slung into the machine.

It was a Lysenko-begotten silly business, altogether. He seemed to be sitting now on nothing in particular, in the middle of a bright blue sky with clouds in it, while an obviously spurious landscape (flat, with antique square houses and a lot of palm trees, the whole being tilted at a forty-five degree angle) gently rose toward him. He watched this process with growing disapproval until the scene grew to full size and he bumped gently against a sidewalk which felt like sponge rubber.

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He stood up and soared some twenty feet into the air, coming down in an approximately upright position. He looked around him, breathing heavily. His head was clearing, and he didn't like it. What had seemed idle nonsense a few moments ago was now assuming the aspect of an incredible reality. The buildings around him were angular and massive, with an appalling quantity of extremely ugly embellishments in the way of glass bricks, chromium statues, walls of enormous windows. The people were all either walking or driving antique four-wheeled vehicles, and most of them were dressed in garments constructed on a curious cylinder principle, also with a great deal of angular detail work.

This period, he recalled, had been addicted to what its denizens termed "the functional" in design. Not a curved line anywhere.

Culturally, this was a dismal era, yet being in it gave Mazurin a holy thrill. There was practically no doubt about it—Blodgett himself was alive at this actual moment!

Directly in front of Mazurin,

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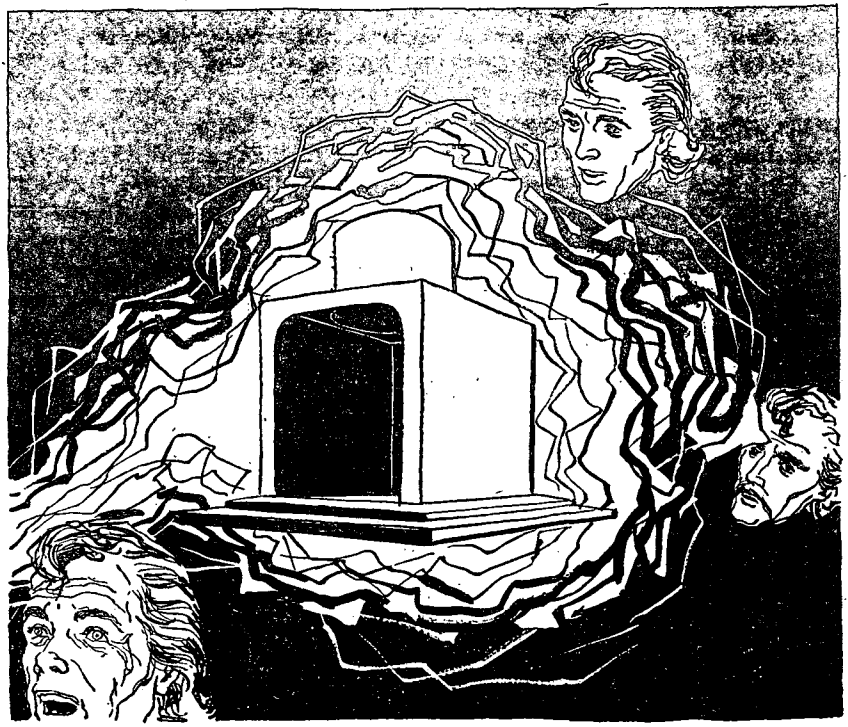
the street widened into a sort of village square, in the center of which a wooden platform was erected. A man in black stood on this platform, evidently making a speech to a small crowd assembled around him. Mazurin saw several instruments which were evidently crude vision cameras. He watched the speaker's lips, and made out a few phrases: ". . . the principles of loyalty and obedience to which we are all dedicated . . . one world, one people, one leader, one glorious ideal . . ."

Interested, he walked closer. A gentleman approaching the crowd on a tangential course strode into him before he had time to get out of the way, and Mazurin found himself violently propelled several yards away, to bounce from still another moving spectator and come to rest finally sprawled on the pavement.

He got up determinedly, soaring as before, and this time leaped squarely into the thick of the crowd before any other outriders could get at him. The crowd was close-packed, and he stood with very little difficulty on their heads. Now



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he was near enough to read the speaker's lips easily, and he followed the speech with attention.

"ON THIS, our youngest but not least hallowed day, we must dedicate ourselves in our hearts to the eternal principles for which so many brave men and women died. For if we do, those men and women are not ten years dead, but gloriously living in the eternal atmosphere of our truth. If we do this, the world did not end for them on that terrible day, August the seventeenth, nineteen eighty-one. The world will never end for them and for ourselves!"

The speaker paused. "Citizens of the world, a salute to the heroes of the World State!"

A man to the right of the speaker's platform, dressed in an exceedingly ugly green uniform, raised a brass instrument to his lips and blew mightily on it. Mazurin leaped nimbly as the citizens on whom he stood took off their hats and bowed their heads. The musician got through with whatever sounds he had been producing, and a row of similarly dressed men behind him raised antique rapid-fire rifles to their shoulders, aiming diagonally upward.

Mazurin, directly in the line of fire, automatically threw himself flat, but he was still unused to his new condition and the motion sent him in a lazy parabola five feet over the crowd's heads.

The guns fired in unison, but a peculiar thing happened. From three-quarters of them leaped streaks of fire; from the other quarter issued something else entirely. At the end of each barrel, a dark blue bubble appeared. The bubbles swelled rapidly, more and more of them extruding, until they became ovoids three feet long and two feet wide, dotted with stumpy tentacles. Then they dropped out of Mazurin's vision, but he could judge their activity by the way the crowd scattered.

Mazurin leaped nimbly and watched the square empty itself beneath him. The uniformed men broke ranks and fled, some dropping their guns. The crowd was spreading out as quickly as those in the center could force the others back. In the cleared space, the blue ovoids were leaping like frogs, pausing and leaping again. At each pause, a toothless mouth gaped, and Mazurin could almost hear the bass "Urk!" they emitted.

Nobody was left on the speaker's platform except the speaker himself, who had misjudged his vault over the railing and got himself tangled in the large black-and-red flag which draped it. While Mazurin watched, one of the blue ovoids bounded onto the speaker's back, settled down and began contentedly munching his jacket.

As he floated down, Mazurin took a notebook from his pocket and wrote: *Tweedledums: probably*

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pineapple-flavored; very unripe and active; emerged without damper controls and broke up large religious gathering, frightening approx. 500 persons.

II

MAZURIN sat alone in the sun-washed and empty square, letting the full enormity of the scene he had just witnessed seep into him. After a while he took out his notebook again and tried to calculate the probable number of surviving descendants, in his own world, of the five hundred people who had just been introduced to tweedledums. He had got up to five generations, and reached the utterly discouraging figure of 20,420, when he gave up.

He shuddered. He was not a devout man by nature, but he had had the usual training as a child, and the idea of so much as being disrespectful to ancestors—much less confronting them unexpectedly with a troop of *tweedledums!*—made him cringe as if he had touched something unclean.

And the other things had still to be accounted for: the rozzers, the collapsed flooring, the argo paste, the—

No. It was better not to think of that.

He got morosely to his feet and watched as the first of a long line of archaic ground-vehicles zoomed into the square and skidded to a stop. Green-uniformed men got out and ran off in all directions, till the square and the surrounding streets were covered with them. Presently a group of them came running back to the cars, carrying a tweedledum which was struggling furiously to escape. After a while they captured another one.

I hope they get them all, Mazurin thought; but he doubted that they would. Free of the projected energy that ordinarily kept them quiescent, a live tweedledum was the most active and elusive artificial food product ever invented. They had been one of Mazurin's favorite dishes; but he suspected now, with a sliding lurch in his stomach, that he would never, never eat one again.

Something else seemed to be going on at the far side of the square. Resignedly, he propelled himself that way. A large knot of the green-uniformed men had collected near a doorway to one of the square buildings and was slowly moving back toward the cars. Mazurin leaped onto the heads of the crowd for a better view, and, approaching the center of the group, found that the quarry was not tweedledums this time, but people. A young man and a girl, to be exact. They were staggering along with their heads down, pushed and dragged by many hands. As Mazurin watched, someone reached over someone else's arm and struck the girl in the face.

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MAZURIN'S first reaction was horror; his second was bewilderment. He saw now that what his superior had described as an "interesting" era could only be painful to any person of normal sensibilities; for all of these people, without exception, were ancestors in one sense or another!

And why were these officials, who were possibly ancestors, maltreating two young possible ancestors in this manner, instead of running down tweedledums as they had evidently been sent to do? Could it be that the boy and the girl were suspected of being responsible for the catastrophe?

It was absurd, but the only explanation he could think of. He followed, soaring over the rooftops, as the car containing the two zoomed off again.

He managed to keep in sight of the car, though it moved much too fast for him, and saw the two captives half-dragged, half-carried up the steps of a large, cubical black building.

Once inside the building, however, he was lost in a maze of corridors full of hurrying, worried-looking people. The place was three stories tall above the ground, and ten stories below, and there were hundreds of separate offices and suites. It was not till a full hour later that he found them, in a brilliantly lit cell facing a white-enameled corridor, in the lowest level of all.

If it weren't for the bruises and cuts on their faces, Mazurin thought, they would have been a handsome couple. The boy was tall and lean, with a dark, thoughtful face; the girl was neatly rounded and had a charming head of almost-platinum hair.

They were sitting side by side on a hard, narrow bench that ran from wall to wall of their five-by-five cubicle. The harsh glare that illuminated them was hard on Mazurin's eyes; he put his polarized goggles on. They themselves had shut their eyes tight against the fierce light, and their heads were close together; their hands clasped.

Mazurin watched their lips. The girl was saying, "We must be guilty, of course. I mean guilty of *something.*"

"Or they never would have arrested us," the young man finished after a pause.

"Yes," said the girl. "They are always right. *Always.* So we must be guilty. And yet it's hard to see—"

"Hush, dear. It isn't for us to question what they do. Perhaps we have committed some crime without even being aware of it. Or maybe—"

"Yes?"

"Well, maybe they are just testing us, or—or something."

THE girl's eyes opened for a second. "Oh, Rob, do you suppose that's it?"

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"It might be. Certainly we didn't cause any disturbance at the patriotic meeting that we *know* of."

"But it's not for us to judge."

"No."

For some time, while he watched this conversation, Mazurin had been increasingly aware that the two young people were doing something rather odd. It had to do with their hands. He stopped watching their lips altogether and concentrated on the hands.

They were clasped loosely together on the bench between the two, half covered by the drape of the girl's flowered skirt. Between the boy's palms and the girl's, Mazurin could see a constant flicker of motion, fingers flashing back and forth, first hers, then his.

Now this, thought Mazurin, was extremely interesting. Beyond a doubt, the two prisoners were communicating by means of some ancient form of the finger-code he had learned as a raw cadet in the Internal Security Commission. If he could only get closer, he was almost sure, he could read it . . .

Cadenced footsteps came down the corridor. It was a white-robed attendant, flanked by two of the green-clad officials, each with a drawn missile gun. The attendant was carrying something in a white enamel tray, and in his other hand he had something that looked like the key to an old-fashioned mechanical lock.

Clearly, they were going to open the young people's cell, to feed them, most probably. If he could slip in while they did it . . . Caution urged him back, curiosity drew him forward. There was no danger, he told himself. If the cell was opened once, it would be opened again, and he could get out. He made up his mind.

The two guards stepped back, guns ready, as the attendant opened the door and stepped inside, depositing the tray—which did, indeed, contain food of some sort—on a shelf. As he stepped out again, Mazurin, lithe as a rozzer, squeezed in past him. Simultaneously, two things happened.

The door shut with a clang.

Mazurin topped to the metal floor under a totally unexpected access of weight.

The two prisoners, the attendant, and the guard turned to stare at him with saucer eyes.

WHILE he sat there, feeling as if someone had slugged him from behind, the three men outside exploded into activity. The attendant fled with hoarse cries down the corridor, and the two guards threw themselves flat, aiming their curious weapons at Mazurin. The two people in the cell with him, he was vaguely aware, had moved as far away as they could get and were sitting in stricken silence.

Mazurin said weakly, "Kamerad. Tovarich. Ami." Then it occurred

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to him that these men spoke English and, anyway, they apparently didn't intend to shoot. Not as long as he didn't move, at any rate. He shut up and tried to think. What the Blodgett had happened to him?

The metal floor of the cell was hard and cold under his palms. He was here, all right, and not on the end of any pencil of temporal energy. It had happened when the cell door shut behind him.

He looked at the door. It was a grid of stout chrome-plated bars, with an interval between the bars of about three centimeters. A nonsense phrase came into his mind, "Eve and Agrid," which meant nothing. It wasn't Eve and Agrid; it was Eve and Adam. Eve and Agrid. Eve and Agrid. Aveandagrid—

Even a grid.

Mazurin shut his eyes and groaned. He opened them again when one of the guards made a warning sort of noise, and stared miserably at the limited vista before him. "Above all," one of the technicians had said, "don't get yourself completely surrounded by metal, *even a grid.* It will break the temporal beam and you'll be marooned there . . ."

Marooned. Stuck with a lot of irrational people in a barbaric century. In a cell, at that. Under suspicious circumstances.

He thought about it gloomily for a few minutes before, being a naturally cheerful young man, he tried to find the brighter side of it. Even then, the best he could do was, *Well, things can't get any worse, and Blodgett himself is alive right at this moment.*

Running footsteps approached down the corridor, and a squadron of the green-uniformed men hove into view. Two of them had a thing on a wheeled tripod that looked as if it were capable of blowing out the side of a building. The rest spread out with drawn hand-guns. The two on the floor got up, saluted and joined the semi-circle.

"Stand up!" said one who seemed to be in command.

Mazurin obeyed with alacrity.

"Remove that mask! Put your hands behind your head! Face the wall!"

When he had done all that, the cell door opened, someone took two swift strides inside, and then colored lights detonated inside Mazurin's head.

He couldn't have been entirely out, because when he came to he was already thinking, *Very efficient police methods. They didn't take any chances. Just the way an ISC man would have handled it . . .*

HIS head ached abominably, and his hands and feet seemed swollen. Green-trousered legs were scissoring back and forth in front of his eyes, and the gray concrete floor was moving rapidly backward under him. He was, he realized,

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trussed up like a rozzer, being dragged down the corridor.

His head cleared a little and he glanced to either side. The boy and the girl were in the party, in approximately the same condition as himself.

They reached an elevator, and Mazurin got a view of its scuffed metal floor before they carried him out of it again. More corridor, black-tiled this time. Several turns. Then a doorway with an ebony sill, followed by flooring of some brown composition, probably a primitive pressed fiber.

Finally he was set upright against a slender metal post and manacled there. The boy and girl were similarly disposed of to his right.

A round man in the green uniform stalked quickly in and stared at Mazurin. His little blue eyes darted quickly from Mazurin's cloth-of-platinum robe to his face, then to the equipment hung at his belt.

"All right," the round man said, "who are you?"

Mazurin opened his mouth, then shut it again. Tell the truth? Oh, no.

His training as a law officer told him exactly what would happen to him if he did. But what lie could he invent that would save him the pain of being questioned? For he had no doubt that being questioned in this era would be painful, despite the rudimentary methods.

The best thing, he decided, was to say nothing. He tried it.

The round man nodded decisively. "We'll see," he said. He turned as a second and a third officer strode in. All three stared at Mazurin, then turned and went to the far end of the room. Mazurin could read their lips easily.

"We knew they were cooking up something, but we had no reports that even hinted at anything like this."

"I don't like the smell of it. Why would they materialize him in that cell and then let us capture him? Better get him out of the city as fast as possible."

The round man got in the way at that point and Mazurin missed some of it. Then all of them turned to come back, and he caught one more sentence: "Put them all in one cell, and we may learn something."

The three of them were detached from the pillars, efficiently trussed up again, and hurried outside to the waiting maw of a long black paddy-wagon.

IT WAS a long ride and an uncomfortable one. Not being able to talk under the eyes of the guards, Mazurin had plenty of time to think, and, by the time half an hour had gone by, he was shoulder-deep in gloom.

He was roused out of himself when the car suddenly leaped six inches off the road, came down and leaped again. Looking back through

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the barred window, Mazurin could see that they had left the smooth concrete highway and were rushing down a cowpath of some kind. He and the two young people, all with their wrists manacled around a horizontal bar, bounced like popcorn. The two guards crooked their free arms around stanchions.

Glancing down, Mazurin noted that the two kids were at it again with the fingers. He looked away miserably, then peeked back. It was his damned curiosity that had put him there; he might as well satisfy it while he could—if he could.

THE code was the same, all right: five standard positions for each of the five fingers gave you twenty-five letters, and a clenched fist was "X" if you needed it. After a moment, he could read what the boy was saying without difficulty.

". . . in my shoe. If they give me a chance . . ."

"Charlie, I'm scared!"

"Only way. They'll get it all out of us otherwise. They know how to. Would have done it before now if he hadn't turned up."

"Think he's one of ours?"

"Can't be; we haven't anything like that. Don't understand it, but can't take any chances. He might be a spy."

They meant *him,* Mazurin surmised. An interesting century, indeed.

The girl again: "Okay. I guess it's worth it."

It occurred to Mazurin, with an ineffable shock, that it must be poison Charlie had in his shoe, of all unsanitary places . . . They were going to kill themselves, to keep the authorities from putting them to question. Evidently, either a large and fanatical fraternal society, or else a revolutionary group; all kinds of secrets. But he couldn't let them commit suicide! Such a thing would be an ineradicable blot on the totems of their thousands of descendants. Even worse, he didn't know their surnames; they might be his own great-great-great-great grandparents.

Worst of all, he suddenly realized, their suicide might blot more than totems—himself, for example, right out of existence!

He could alert the guards, of course, but the more he thought about that, the less he liked it. Questioning, this far back in history, would be sure not to be subtle. From one point of view it was perfectly sensible of them to prefer poison. *Bump!* If only the car would stop bouncing for a minute so he could think . . .

The car abruptly outdid itself. Mazurin found himself whirling around the horizontal bar like a demented acrobat, while two green blurs that were the guards soared airily to the forward end of the compartment. Something struck Mazurin a dizzying blow on the head, the car bounced twice more and came to rest, while the echoes of a

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thunderous explosion died away in his ears.

III

THE car was canted, half in a ditch. The guards, piled up against the forward wall, were not moving. Charlie and the girl were half stunned but conscious. Mazurin pulled futilely at his wrist-cuffs; they were too tight even for his trained hands to slip.

Acrid fumes drifted into the car through a burst seam in the rear. Mazurin sniffed, and felt a cold dew break out on his forehead.

"Oh, what is it?" asked the girl faintly.

"Argo paste," said Mazurin, jittering. "It must have started coming out of the exhaust or the jet tube—whatever these vehicles use. Oh, sacred name . . ."

"What's argo paste?" demanded the youth groggily. "I never heard of the stuff."

"I know you haven't," Mazurin said. He groaned. "They use it to burn through metal. It's supposed to come out into glazed vats. If only it's stopped—"

The fumes grew thicker. Mazurin looked out the barred rear window.

"We're in a pool of it," he said. He turned. "Can you reach those two?" he asked the boy, nodding toward the two unconscious guards.

The boy shook his head. "They haven't got our keys, anyhow. The guard up front with the driver has them. And he's knocked out, or he'd have been back here by now."

The car lurched and settled. A section of the floor began smoking and dripped away, leaving a puckered gap through which they could see a slowly heaving pool of gray paste.

"Can you get your shoe off?" Mazurin asked suddenly.

Charlie gave him a look full of suspicion.

"Your shoe," Mazurin repeated with agonized patience. "Either one, it doesn't matter." He slipped his left foot out of his own elastic-topped sandal, grasped it between his toes and held it up. "Mine's no good, you see? Too thin. Yours is made of thick leather. Can you take it off?"

"I don't get it," said Charlie, baffled. A heavier drift of choking fog came up through the vanishing floor. "But—" He grunted, raising and twisting his leg until his manacled hands could reach the laces. "Here." He dropped the shoe and kicked it along to Mazurin.

The car settled again. The pool of gray slime was now only a foot below them. Mazurin grasped the shoe with his toes, shifting his grip till it was as firm as he could manage. Then he held on like grim death and lowered the shoe through the gap in the floor, into the gray pool underneath. He brought it up quickly.

There was a good gob of the stuff in the heel end of the shoe,

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about two inches from his own bare foot, but it was smoking furiously. In another second, the leather would be eaten through.

He brought the shoe up, under the horizontal bar, over it again—and dumped the paste on the bar just as the leather gave way. The metal smoked acridly and melted.

Mazurin jettisoned the shoe, jammed his foot back into his own sandal, and peered at the bar through watering eyes. There was a hearty bite out of it, but a slender tongue of metal still united the two sections.

"Now!" said Mazurin. "Pull!"

He braced his back and shoved at the bar till his muscles cracked, while Charlie, his face white with strain, pulled from his side. The car lurched once more, and the gray surface beneath, leaped up to the level of the floorboards. Mazurin got his feet up on the bar and gave one last desperate shove. The metal gave a *ping* and moved a fraction of an inch. Through the smoke, Mazurin saw that the narrow part had snapped. He pushed some more, until the bar reluctantly bent a full three inches out of its original line.

KNEELING on the bench, Mazurin held his wrists carefully away from the smouldering ends of the bar and slipped his arms free.

"Nice work so far," said Charlie, "but what about the door?"

He slid down to the end of the bench and moved his own arms free of the bar. The car tilted again as the girl moved to follow him.

"Get back!" said Mazurin urgently. He motioned Charlie to the forward end of the car. "Balance the weight while she gets loose." He looked at the door that still barred their way to freedom. The lock, naturally, was about halfway up, better than two feet from the level of the argo paste. "Other shoe," he told Charlie. "Can't be helped."

Charlie took it off and handed it down to him. The girl had got her arms free now and was leaning forward with the wristcuffs spread, evidently intending to touch the connecting piece to the smoking end of the bar.

"No!" yelled Mazurin, and she started back. "Horrible stuff—get a drop of it on your flesh, no way to stop it. Get back with Charlie, please."

Squatting on the bench, he leaned forward precariously and dipped the second shoe into the seething gray mass. He got a bigger quantity this time, and he could control it better. He brought it up swiftly and carefully poured it over the lock, peering through the haze to make sure he had the right place.

Smoke gushed out, and he couldn't see what was happening; but he pushed the door outward, and it gave. He stood up, put one foot on the opposite bench, and got the other wedged into the

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barred opening of the door. A push and a twist, and he was precariously balanced outside, directly over the center of the viscous, smoking pool.

The car settled again under his weight. He scrambled to get both feet on top of the door, lunged and sprawled across the smooth top of the car. Panting, he got his feet under him again and flung himself forward, feeling the car tilt slightly under him as he moved.

"All right," he called, "come out quickly!"

He saw a motion beneath him, and turned as the door of the cab opened and a head thrust itself out. The head shook itself, dazedly. Mazurin, flat on his stomach, leaned out and slammed his manacled wrists apologetically under the man's ear.

"Sorry, Sacred Ancestor," he said regretfully. "One must take sides, it would seem."

THE guard dived slowly and gracefully out of the open door and sprawled on the grass outside. Mazurin, overbalanced by the blow, felt himself slipping, grabbed for a hand-hold, then let himself go. He landed on his shoulders, rolled quickly and stood up, poised to leap into the cab. But the second uniformed man was still hunched over with his flattened face pressed against the windshield. A trickle of blood trailed from his ear.

Mazurin looked up as Charlie appeared on top of the car, followed by the girl. "All secure here," he said. "You two all right?"

"We're just fine," said Charlie grimly, "and we're certainly grateful to you for saving our lives. But would you mind giving us a hint of what this is all about?" He and the girl jumped down beside Mazurin, and Charlie gestured toward the dwindling rear end of the car. "Argo paste," he said. "And those things back in Welfare Square."

"Tweedledums," Mazurin supplied helpfully. "Pineapple-flavored, I think."

"Tweedledums," repeated the boy. "And you. What are you, the Mad Hatter? If so, what are you going to pull out of your hat next?"

"There's lots more," Mazurin said gloomily. "We haven't seen the flangs yet, or the collapsed flooring, or the rozzers, or—"

"Wait a minute," Charlie interrupted. "Just one minute. One thing at a time. What are flangs?"

Mazurin searched his mind for the archaic word. Castards? Something like that. Ces, cis, cos—"Custards," he said. "From the French *flan,* although I believe there was some influence dating from the Early Hollywood Era. They're mobile, but not as much as the tweedledums. They only creep around, and they like to crawl into any dark enclosed space they find. So you just leave them with a bunch of open pastry shells, and—"

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Charlie interrupted again. "All right, I knew it was going to be something like that. I won't ask you what rozzers are."

"Like a very slender pig," said Mazurin promptly. "Fast as lightning. Some people like to race them."

"And eat them."

"Eat rozzers?" Mazurin exclaimed in disgust. "We'd sooner starve!"

CHARLIE looked at him, breathing heavily. "All I want to know," he said, "is where all these things that nobody ever heard of came from, and that includes you."

"Well, I'll tell you," said Mazurin reluctantly, "but I have a feeling you won't believe me."

He squatted and began going through the pockets of the guard who lay on the greensward at their feet.

"No," said Charlie, and gave him a push that sent him sprawling. Charlie knelt quickly and removed the guard's hand-gun from its holster. Backing up, he handed the gun to the girl and then went back to the guard. "Sorry, but I don't see how we can trust you."

He found the guard's keys, stood up and held the gun trained on Mazurin while the girl unlocked his wristcuffs; then they traded while he unlocked hers. It seemed, Mazurin thought ruefully, that they had no present intention of unlocking his.

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"Can I get up now?" he asked mildly.

"Yes," said Charlie. He gestured with the gun to their left, across an open field that ended at a wooded ridge. "We've got to get under cover." He glanced at the gun in his hand, then back at the smoking rear of the paddy-wagon. "What do you think, Eve?"

"It would be nice to have it," the girl said regretfully, "but it's a sure tipoff."

"Right," said Charlie, and he returned the gun to the guard's holster. Then he pulled the keys out of his pocket and replaced them as well.

"Hey," objected Mazurin, "when do I get out of these things?"

"Later—maybe," said Charlie. "By the time anybody finds the car, there's a good chance that the whole rear end will be gone, and they'll figure we went with it. But not if we take anything from this guy."

"They'll die if we leave them unconscious in this pool of argo paste!" Mazurin said, horrified.

"What of it?" Charlie wanted to know. "You don't think they'd let us live long, do you?"

Mazurin paused. "They wouldn't?"

"Certainly not," said Eve. "That's how they stay in power—kill off the opposition."

"But I'm not the opposition," Mazurin denied.

"Oh, no?" Charlie demanded

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threateningly, and Mazurin decided abruptly that he was. Charlie said, "You don't know how close you came to joining these stinkers."

Eve started walking. "Let's go. Someone may come along and ask why we're not helping our gallant lads out of danger."

THEY headed across the field, Mazurin in the lead. He felt a little sick. In his own time, he tried to tell himself, he'd seen men killed often enough for exactly similar reasons. But this wasn't his own time; this time he belonged to his Sacred Ancestors, some of them were being left to die in argo paste. He felt a wave of resentment against the two youngsters behind him, and then recoiled from that, too. *They* could be his ancestors. Now just what in the name of Blodgett could a man do in a situation like this?

They pushed through a tangle of saplings and undergrowth for what seemed like several hours, until they reached a little stream. Eve sat down, gasping, and the other two followed suit.

"It's getting too late to go much farther, anyway," said Charlie. He inspected his shoeless feet glumly, then turned to Mazurin. "All right," he said, "let's have your story, improbable or not."

Mazurin told them, from the beginning. They listened in discouraging silence. Finally, "Is that all?" Charlie asked.

"That's all," said Mazurin. "What happens next *I* don't know, except that we'll probably run into the rozzers committing a nuisance in City Hall, or somebody triggering a section of collapsed flooring and getting knocked into the next canton, or—"

"What makes you think you're going to see any city hall?" asked Charlie ominously.

"No reason, except that defiling a public building is one of the few supreme crimes I haven't been responsible for yet."

"How's that again?" said Charlie, confused.

"Don't you remember what he said about ancestor worship?" asked Eve. "It makes sense. He feels directly responsible for all these things that have been happening to people who, for all he knows, may be his own ancestors." She frowned at Mazurin, opened her mouth to speak again. "How—"

"Now wait a minute," Charlie burst out. "You're not assuming that he's telling the truth, are you?"

"You wait," she told him. Then, to Mazurin, "See if I've got this right. You come from about four centuries from now, and in your time the World State is an established fact. There never was any successful attempt to overthrow it. Is that right?"

Mazurin nodded.

Charlie snorted. "Well, if we

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fell for *that,* we'd simply knuckle under and let Blodgett's hoodlums have it all their own way."

"Hoodlums?" Mazurin echoed, touching his forelock. "Our most Sacred of Ancestors!"

Charlie peered at Mazurin puzzledly. "Is that what you're for, to convince us we can't win? It seems a little too simple-minded to deserve all this buildup."

MAZURIN shook his head. "You don't quite understand," he said. "This is a different time-line from the one I came from. It's different because I'm in it, *here.* Anything can happen now."

Charlie looked more baffled than ever.

"Listen," said Eve, "just suppose he is telling the plain truth. And as you said a minute ago, if the Worstas had all that new stuff —materializing him in our cell, and those green things in the Square—why would they waste it on a silly trick like this?"

"All right," said Charlie. "What then?"

"Then he might be able to help us win," said Eve.

"Just for the theoretical interest of it—suppose you could help us overthrow the Worstas, Mazurin, would you do it?"

"The who?"

"The Worstas—the World Staters. Blodgett and his gang. You've seen the kind of tyrannical crew they are. All right, would you help us if you could?"

"Well, no," said Mazurin honestly.

"Why not?"

"Because, for one thing, if I help you I hurt them, and vice versa. I couldn't help either side. It would be irreligious."

Charlie stared at him contemptuously, and Mazurin felt his ears getting red. It did sound stuffy, at that. Why couldn't they have let him stay in his own environment, where a man could take his religion on sacred days and forget about it the rest of the time?

"There's another good reason," he said defensively. "You seem to forget that I come from the world that grew out of this one. Well, it's a pretty good world. It's peaceful; there hasn't been a war in more than three centuries. Nobody has to work hard, as a general rule. No more race or nationality problems—everybody's interbred so much, as a result of the lowering of national barriers, that there's only one kind of people. Why should I want to change all that?"

"No reason, maybe," said the girl, "but you can see why we want to change our world, can't you?"

Mazurin thought about it. "No. It would change the fine world of my time—the world that Blodgett—"

He touched his forelock—"created by the might of his giant intellect."

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"Well, look," said the girl. "Ten years ago there was a world war, the ninth in sixty years. There was a worldwide organization that was fighting the war, had been fighting against war since about nineteen-sixty. They had a lot of followers, on paper, but they weren't strong enough to do anything until the people finally got fed up. After all, it had got to the point where you'd have two or three months of peace after the armistice was signed, and then the whole bloody mess would start all over again.

"CIVILIZATION was going straight downhill. That had been happening for a long time, but now it was happening so fast that you could *see* it happening. There was a spontaneous wave of revolt all through South America, where the fighting was going on at that time. It started with a French regiment that turned around and shot its officers. Then the Canadian regiment they were fighting did the same thing, and after that it spread too fast to figure out how the idea got around.

"All the armies in South America sent delegates to a conference—the conference of Acapulco—and the Worstas put over their program. Then all the armies went home, kicked out their governments, held general elections, and ten months later we had the World State."

"Well," said Mazurin, "what's wrong with—"

"Wait. For five months everything went fine. All the important nations were in, and it was a sure thing that the others—the ones that hadn't been in this particular fighting—would come in later. We had a swell Constitution and we were disarming like fury. Then there was a *coup d'etat*. Blodgett and his gang moved in, kidnaped Provisional President Carres, drugged him and made him sign orders appointing Blodgett's gang to key positions.

"It was logical enough; Blodgett himself was the number two man in the Worstas movement to begin with. By the time anybody found out what was going on, they were so firmly entrenched that they've been able to stamp out every rising against them ever since. They've got the best propaganda line since Stalin, and the people as a whole won't move because there's peace, and they're sick of war. So all we've wound up with is just another damned dictatorship. *Now* do you see?"

"Wait a minute," said Mazurin. He had been listening with growing horror to Eve's use of the Sacred Name. "This Blodgett you're talking about—that can't possibly be Ernest Elwood Vernon Crawford Blodgett, can it?"

"His name is Ernest, and his mother's name was Crawford," said Eve. "Where you got those other handles from, I don't know."

"It's the way we name our-

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selves," Mazurin explained. "Your own given name, given names of two prominent ancestors, one from each line, then mother's and father's line names. Anyway, if that's the Blodgett you're talking about, you must have your facts all wrong. Blodgett—" he touched his forelock—" was the founder and first President of the World State. Kids learn about him in the first course. The Father of the World and so forth. He wasn't any dictator and there wasn't any president before him."

"Blodgett is busy revising the histories right now," said Eve grimly. "I'll bet the big ham hasn't got buck teeth in the pictures you've seen, either."

"Of course not," said Mazurin. "Have you ever seen him in person?" He demanded.

Eve reddened. "No. But I've seen smuggled pictures of him before he got his dentures—"

"Then," said Mazurin triumphantly, "how do you know the pictures *you* saw weren't faked?"

They kept it up for another hour, ruffling tempers all around, until Charlie told them both to pipe down and get some sleep.

IV

MAZURIN awoke feeling as if he had spent the night hanging by his thumbs. His hands were completely numb, and the rest of his body was so stiff and painful that it took him ten minutes to stand up.

The other two had made out a little better, but they were all cold, hungry and short-tempered. They drank water from the stream, ate some wild berries they found after an hour's search, stuffed leaves into Charlie's socks, and then started off again through the woods. Charlie, when Mazurin asked him where they were going, politely requested him to keep his geographically described questions to his precisely defined self.

An hour or so later, when the sun was higher and exercise had loosened their muscles, they were feeling a little better. They had struck a path of sorts under some kind of fragrant trees that were unfamiliar to Mazurin. The branches made a comfortable pattern against the deep-blue sky, and there were birds calling pleasantries back and forth. Mazurin moved up beside Eve and walked with her for a while in silence.

"I suppose I was kidding myself last night when I thought you might be able to help us," she said finally. "We've got a fair chance as it is, but it's awfully risky. It would be nice to know that the Marines were going to ride up at the last moment."

Mazurin made sympathetic noises, feeling a little embarrassed.

"How do you feel about being cut off from your own time?" she

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asked suddenly. "You're in a pretty tough spot, too."

Mazurin realized that he hadn't had time to wonder how he did feel about it. He imagined the technicians back at the Physics Bureau searching through the timelines, finding him by some improbable chance, and yanking him back. He had a clear vision of the expression on the face of his square-jawed superior when that worthy read his report.

He shuddered.

"What's the matter?"

"If I got back now," said Mazurin, "they'd give me one year in the Black House and then turn my totem upside down and demote me to the Cleanliness Inspection Squad."

"Why? Because your mission wasn't successful?"

"Well, that isn't exactly the way my chief would put it. He'd say I was a disgusting ghoul with the moral fiber of a cuckoo, who would pick his teeth with a splinter from his uncle's coffin."

"But you did all you could, didn't you?"

Mazurin conscientiously reviewed his activities of the day before. "I guess I did, but that doesn't matter. They go by results."

"H'm," said Eve. "So does Buck tooth Blodgett. How did you happen to go to work for the—what is it?"

"Internal Security Commission," said Mazurin.

"It would be. Fancy name for secret police, isn't it? Well, how did you happen to join up?"

"Why," said Mazurin in astonishment, "I was selected. When I was fifteen. Those decisions can't be left to individuals."

She stopped and stared at him, wide-eyed. "And you think *that's* the best of all possible worlds? Even Blodgett hasn't pulled anything quite as rank as that yet. But he will, I can see."

She moved on, and Mazurin followed her, puzzled. "How else would you do it?" he inquired.

"Free choice," she said curtly. "Government does its best to provide equal opportunities for everybody, and you choose what you want to be."

"Ah," said Mazurin shrewdly, having swiftly found the illogicality, "but who would want to go into the ISC?"

"Yes," she agreed, "who?"

Mazurin mulled that over for a while.

"It wouldn't work," he said finally. "You could never get people to agree to it, in my time. It goes directly contrary to the teachings of our ancestors."

"Exactly," she said.

Half an hour later, Mazurin was still thinking about the implications of that remark.

THEY stopped when they got to another small stream that Charlie and Eve seemed to recog-

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nize. Charlie washed his face and hands, swore because he had no razor, and looked suspiciously at Mazurin's pinkly beardless chin.

"Depilatory cream," Mazurin told him. "Stuns the follicles for a month. Invented about 2050, I think."

Charlie grunted, but looked half-convinced.

"Let me have those sandals," he said. He put them on and climbed along to the top of the next ridge. He looked cautiously over, then waved to Eve and disappeared over the top.

"What now?" asked Mazurin.

"We wait here," said Eve shortly. "There's a town up ahead where one of our contacts lives. Charlie's going in to see if it's safe."

He was back in half an hour, wearing shoes and carrying Mazurin's sandals wrapped in a bundle. He looked worried. "There's hell to pay," he told Eve, then turned to Mazurin. "I guess you're on the level, all right. Those cockeyed things of yours—the tweedledums and so forth—have been popping up all over this area for the last twenty-four hours. The Worstas are going crazy. They can't figure it out, and it scares them. The place is swarming with troops and no-goods."

"National Guardsmen," Eve explained to Mazurin, seeing his puzzled look. "N. G.—no good. They're a bunch of picked stinkers, probably about like your ICS. Anybody ever call your crowd the Icks, by the way?"

Charlie made an impatient gesture, cutting off Mazurin's reply. "Here's what we're up against," he said. "Bauernfeind got through to H.Q. all right, and they'll send a 'copter in time to get us to rendezvous. But the woods are full of patrols—we're lucky we haven't been picked up before now. The only place we'll be safe is in Bauernfeind's sub-cellar."

He stared at Mazurin's outlandish costume. "You and I probably can get through all right, one at a time," he said to Eve, "but he's a problem. I was ready to ditch him if we had to, but Bauernfeind says we've got to take him along; the Central Council wants him. We couldn't figure out any way to take those cuffs off, without bringing a machine shop out here. Best we could think of was this."

HE UNFOLDED his bundle and produced a long-sleeved robe, a pair of scissors, needles and thread. "There are two or three different sects in the hills around here," he explained. "This isn't quite the color any of 'em wear—Bauernfeind got it from a theatrical costumer's—but he thinks it will pass. We'll have to cut it open, so he can get his arms into the sleeves, and then sew him into it." He picked up the scissors and spread the robe out over his knees.

"No, not that way," said Eve,

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and took the scissors from him. 'Underneath, where it won't show." She rapidly snipped the robe apart, starting in the middle of the chest, upward to the end of each sleeve.

The result looked like nothing that would ever serve as a garment again, but she slipped it over Mazurin's head, brought the dangling top part over his shoulders and, working swiftly, sewed it into shape again.

"That'll hold," she said, "*if* you don't wave your arms around. Remember, you've got your hands clasped in meditation, and you keep your eyes down. What about those sandals, Charlie?"

"Half the crackpots in California wear them," he said. "And that long hair of his looks natural in this getup. Let's move along."

Mazurin did as he was told. His head ached miserably, and it seemed to him that his situation was getting worse by the minute. From the time that he had been captured by the Worstas, he'd had no power of decision whatever; and, even worse, he still had no idea what he could do if he were free to do it.

Mazurin walked forward mechanically, still only half-attentive. Just suppose he were to settle down in this century—providing he could get out of this present mess alive. Suppose he married and had progeny. That would obviously make *him* an ancestor, from the viewpoint of his own time. Then it would be just as important to save his own neck as anybody else's! . . .

Wait a minute, there was something funny about that line of reasoning. Everybody, theoretically, could continue his own line. So when was an ancestor an object of veneration and when was he just a person? It couldn't be merely a matter of elapsed time, could it? Because elapsed time was subjective, an abstraction, a point of view. From where he was now, the world he came from didn't even exist; it was just a remote future possibility. But—

IT WAS too much. Mazurin thought he saw the glimmer of a final answer, but he couldn't pursue it. It made him feel dizzy when he tried.

They clambered cautiously up to the top of the ridge, recon-

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noitered, and went down the other side to where a dusty road showed through the trees. Directly ahead of them, when they reached the road, were the outskirts of a small, weatherbeaten town. They waited for twenty minutes before a squad of soldiers hanging around in front of a warehouse decided to go elsewhere. Twice they heard distant shots, and once a confused sound of yelling.

Mazurin sighed with relief when they finally reached a fairly well-populated street. Mingling with the crowd, Charlie in front, then Mazurin, and Eve bringing up the rear, they weren't conspicuous, but as a group they had been decidedly peculiar. And if they looked nervous, he decided, it was in character; so did most of the people he saw around him. Every block or so they passed a patrol of green-uniformed men, hands on the straps of their slung missile weapons, looking alertly to each side as they walked.

The three bunched momentarily as they waited for a traffic light to change, and Charlie murmured, "Two blocks more, then half a block to the right. It's the place called 'Hi-Tone Tailors.' Go straight to the back and down the stairs."

He stopped talking as a green-uniformed officer paused nearby and glanced at them. The light changed and they started across the street. Mazurin kept his eyes down, as directed, even when a loud whirring noise approached him from behind and hovered over him. Immediately thereafter, something mushy hit him on the head and slithered down his face, blinding him momentarily.

He heard startled cries around him. The next instant, the mushy something had reached his nose and was trying to crawl up it. Strangling, Mazurin unwarily opened his mouth, and the stuff crawled into that, too. He swallowed as much as he could—it was lemon-flavored—and spat the rest.

He looked up just in time to see another glob hurtling toward him. He flung up his hands instinctively, and heard the popping threads as Eve's hasty stitching gave way.

ABOVE him the flangs were raining down. The whirring noise, he found, proceeded from the blades of a helicopter that was hovering over the intersection. Two green-uniformed men in its cab were leaning out to peer in amazement and horror at the four loudspeaker horns fixed to its underside. From these, in an apparently endless flow, issued the flangs. They were piling up underfoot now, climbing up people's trouser legs, squirming in a custardy wave toward the comparative darkness of doorways.

Desperately, Mazurin warded off another yellow blob, leaped the writhing form of a fat citizen who had flangs in his pants, and then

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lost his own footing, skidding half the width of the street and fetching up against a green-uniformed soldier. He saw the soldier's eyes widen as he caught sight of the wristcuffs. Then there was a shout and a whirl of motion, and something hard struck him solidly on the back of the head.

LIGHT brought him to: blinding, hot yellow light that shone through his closed lids and made his eyes water fiercely. He tried instinctively to turn his head aside, and found he couldn't. For a moment he couldn't orient himself; he was being put to the question, that was obvious, but what for? He hadn't done anything—or had he? How had he made out on that time mission? He had a dim recollection of something unpleasant . . .

The rest of the memories came back then, and Mazurin groaned. He was in the hands of the Worstas again, those peculiarly unpleasant ancestors who were incredibly the founders of his own state; and some of the police methods in this century were crude, he remembered.

They'd got the other two, undoubtedly. They'd all been close together when the flangs started falling, and the soldiers would have rounded up everybody in sight after they caught him. Now it was going to be bad. Now it was going to be *very* bad.

He heard a sudden "Ouch!" and then a stifled shriek. A moment later he understood the reason; something needle-sharp was jabbed an inch into his left buttock. He added his outcry to the others, whereupon a voice said, "They're ready, Mr. President."

"Proceed," said a slightly lisping voice. "Begin with the girl."

"Your name is Gertrude Meyer?" said the other.

Mazurin heard the girl gasp. She said, "Yes."

"You are a member of the underground society of wreckers and assassins known as the Freedom Party, and you are known to your co-conspirators as Eve?"

Again the gasp, and again, "Yes."

"You are aware of a plot to assassinate the President?"

The gasp, a pause, then another gasp. "Yes!"

"What is the nature of this plot?"

This time Eve sobbed. "Oh, *don't* do that—*oh!*"

"What is the nature of this plot?"

"Oh! I don't know—" She shrieked and then Mazurin heard her weeping. "I'll never tell you —*oh!*—anything. *Oh!*"

Mazurin found himself struggling like a wild man against his shackles. He had an idea he knew what they were doing to Eve; it was a traditional method of interrogating females, so they'd probably had it even this early. It was very

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nearly infallible, and very unpleasant to think about.

EVE'S cries grew louder and more frequent. Finally she screamed and there was silence for a while. Then the interrogation began again. After twenty minutes, Eve began telling all she knew.

It was a primitive plot, and it seemed to Mazurin that it could have had only a slender chance of success even in so barbaric an era as this one. In his own time, nothing whatever would be gained by assassinating the Chief Executive; the next eligible member of the Executive Families, would simply take over. What you had to watch out for was thought subversion and heresy.

Here, apparently, the critical area was at the top. Blodgett was so obsessed by the idea that someone in his hierarchy might kick him out, as he'd done to Carres, that he'd made sure that the whole structure would collapse without him.

The Freedom Party knew this, or guessed it, according to Eve. They didn't know exactly what would happen if they killed Blodgett, but they were pretty sure it would be fatal to the present dictatorial group. In any case, they'd be rid of Blodgett and would, at worst, take their chances on his successor being less brutal.

The time they'd picked was an annual celebration at which Blodgett traditionally showed himself. It was always held in a big outdoor arena, and there would be thousands of spectators. Blodgett would be well guarded, of course, but they couldn't possibly screen everybody who got into the arena. All the revolutionists needed was an inconspicuous weapon, and it seemed that the underground's scientists had perfected one about eight months ago and had been turning them out in quantity in a hidden factory. Eve didn't know where the factory was. She and Charlie were the liaison agents, who were to pick up the completed weapons from other agents and take them to distribution points.

The weapon was a miniature bazooka. Only two inches long, it could be concealed so well that only the most rigorous search would find it, and its range was more than adequate for the job they wanted to do. Accuracy would have been too much to ask for, but they had intended to concentrate the fire of several hundred weapons on the rostrum, and hope that Blodgett would be killed.

The questioners took Eve through the whole story again, then started on Charlie. He held out for a few minutes, but he talked. He knew no more than Eve.

THEN it was Mazurin's turn.

The first question was: "What is your name?" and it was followed instantly by the touch of

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warm metal on the back of his hand.

Only a reminder, Mazurin guessed. They thought he was valuable and wanted to be very careful not to injure him seriously; but if he didn't answer satisfactorily, the iron would get hotter. And many things, Mazurin knew, could be done with iron not hot enough to burn.

He answered the question with his full name. The next was, "Where do you come from?" He told the truth, not expecting to be believed, but unable to think of any lie that would be more credible.

There was a muttered consultation, then, "Do you maintain that you can tell us about events which are to us in the future, because your knowledge of what is to you history?"

Mazurin said, "Yes, only—"

Blodgett's lisping voice interrupted him. "That's enough. General, this information is restricted. Take him into my private office. I will continue the interrogation personally."

The light clicked off, and Mazurin felt the shackles being loosened.

"Prisoner, have you given any of this information to these other two?"

Mazurin hesitated, trying to figure out which was the dangerous answer, yes or no. The President's voice said, "Never mind, General. I will assume that he has. Bring all three of them into my private office. Here, give me those manacle keys."

Someone hauled Mazurin off the table on which he had been lying and locked his wrists together. He was able to open his smarting eyes after a moment, but he could see nothing except the after-image of the brilliant interrogation light. Hands turned him, pushed him, caught him when he staggered and kept him moving. He heard the shuffle of other feet. Eve was crying quietly.

A door was opened ahead of them. Mazurin was led forward a few steps and then shoved into a deep cushioned chair. Footsteps receded and the door shut again. Deep silence fell instantly, punctuated by their breathing and the President's soft footsteps, then the slight creak of a swivel chair.

"Now," said Blodgett's voice, apparently from some little distance. "We are entirely private here; this room is soundproof and spyproof. Tell me all about the future of my regime, Mr. Mazurin—and, I warn you, tell me the truth."

MAZURIN'S vision was clearing rapidly. Directly ahead of him, twenty feet away across a deep carpet and a huge polished desk, sat Blodgett. He didn't look anything like the pictures in the histories. He was short and plump,

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and he looked crafty and nervous and worried. Mazurin glanced to his right. There was a row of chairs like his own, and in two of them, manacled like himself, were Eve and Charlie. Eve was bent over with her head in her hands; Charlie was rigid and stony-faced.

Perhaps the history books had idealized Blodgett's appearance. It didn't matter. Mazurin was in the Presence and he was awed.

"In case any of you are thinking of attempting violence against me," remarked Blodgett, "don't." He showed them a heavy little machine-gun, mounted on a wheeled frame, that stood on his desk. "You are too far away, and those extremely comfortable chairs are ingenuously hard to get out of. Also, this room contains a minor arsenal. I could fight off a regiment here, if I had to. Now, Mr. Mazurin, talk. You needn't be afraid of telling the truth, whether you think I'll like it or not. You're a mine of information, and I expect to be able to use you for a long time to come. So tell me the unvarnished truth."

Mazurin told him.

Blodgett smiled at the end of it. "One thing more, Mr. Mazurin. At what age will I die?"

"I don't remember exactly, Your Honor. About eighty, as I recall."

"Good, good," said Blodgett. "Surprisingly good." He took a seedless grape from the bowl in

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front of him and popped it into his mouth. "You are sure, Mr. Mazurin, that you have not colored this tale to please my fancy? No, I can see that you are sincere; you have no reason to lie."

He ate another grape, smiling, pushed the bowl aside and leaned confidently over the desk.

"If you had prophesied disaster, Mr. Mazurin," he said, "I should never in the world have believed you. Do you know why?" The pause was rhetorical. "Because I belong to the ages. I know it. I have felt it since I was a young man. I was born to rule the world. Would you believe that I have known that since I was twenty? And my rule is destined to endure; I knew that.

"Why? Because I started with what every other conqueror tried in vain to achieve—a world dominion. It is all the world or none, Mr. Mazurin. Napoleon knew that. Hitler knew that. Stalin knew that. And that was the inexorable law that humbled each in his turn. They tried to achieve peace through war—fatal, fatal. They had to try, of course. They were born to rule, too, but the wrong time."

He talked on interminably, his face growing flushed and his eyes glistening. He gestured, he smiled, he frowned. Didactic, he stood up and leaned earnestly over the table. Self-satisfied, he sat back and popped grapes into his mouth. Mystical, he stared at the ceiling.

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It was during the latter phase that Mazurin—like the other two, half-stunned by oratory—suddenly came awake. From the muzzle of the squat weapon on Blodgett's desk, a tiny green bubble bulged. As Mazurin watched, the bubble grew to half an inch dropped to the desk and rolled until the edge of the fruit-bowl stopped it.

Mazurin felt suddenly cold all over. He darted a glance to his right. Eve was looking at the floor and had seen nothing; but Charlie was looking at him with one eyebrow raised, an expression that said plainly, *What is it?*

Mazurin looked back at the President. Blodgett brought a rolling period to a close, smiled soulfully, sighed, and became stern.

"As for you, sir," he said, "your destiny is allied with mine. To this favor you must submit. I do not ask, I give. I give you a living god, as you have yourself justly described me, to worship and follow faithfully all of your life. And I give you what is immeasurably more precious than the schoolboys' history you give me—I give you a place beside me in all the history that's yet to be written!"

For an instance, that idea captured Mazurin's imagination. What a fantastic end to his assignment that would be—the Chief Executive, and the ISC Intelligence chief, and everybody, worshipping every holy day at his shrine!

Even while that thought raced through his mind, Mazurin watched the tiny green globule in utter fascination. If Blodgett reached for that globule, thinking it a grape, then for the first time in this whole misbegotten affair Mazurin would have reached a point of decision. And to save himself he couldn't tell whether he wanted that or not. He knew what he wanted to do, well enough, but he felt the first premonitory stirrings of a guilt that he knew would plague him for years after the act. What right had he to interfere with the lives of millions of still unborn?

Mazurin, he told himself, *you're an ancestor!* He glanced at Eve's pale, drawn face. *I'll see to it that you are,* he added.

BLODGETT'S open palm came down on the desk, sideswiping the fruit bowl. The bowl wobbled elliptically around the desktop, spilling grapes. But the nearest to Blodgett's hand was still the globe that was not a grape.

"How say you, sir?" demanded Blodgett. "Destiny or death?"

His hand hovered, as ready for one gesture as another. He glared at Mazurin.

Mazurin took a deep breath. "I choose destiny, Your Honor."

Blodgett's features relaxed. His hand dropped gently on the table, the pudgy fingers curling. Gently they closed on the green sphere. Smiling benignly, Blodgett popped it into his mouth.

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He stayed that way, without changing posture or expression, for three long seconds. Then his eyes bulged. A shout formed itself on his lips, but no sound came out. He—*withered* somehow, shrank indescribably in his uniform. There was a look of horror and of passionate appeal in his eyes. And then, suddenly, Blodgett was not there any longer.

To the others, it looked as if he had simply vanished out of the world of men. But Mazurin, shuddering, knew that his fate had not been that simple—or that pleasant.

Eve gasped, "What was it? That grape he ate—"

Mazurin felt sick. "A mangel."

Charlie demanded, "What's a mangel? What did it do to him?"

MAZURIN said shakily, "You could torture me in the subtlest or cruelest ways and I would not tell you. This primitive civilization is not ready to know anything at all about mangels. Nothing!"

He put his head in his hands. One part of him knew that Blodgett was a stinker; the other part was simply saying, *You let him eat a mangel. You killed him. The most sacred ancestor of all, the Father of the World.*

He heard the other two talking in low, tense voices. Eve said, "Are you thinking what I'm thinking?"

"Blodgett had already started making himself up to look like his propaganda pictures."

"Yes. We could put it over, Charlie. They'd have no choice. It's either agreement or total collapse."

"Gone," Mazurin moaned. "Blodgett. The beautiful society he built with his giant intellect—"

"No," said Charlie. "None of it's lost. Except the worst part of your civilization."

"And certainly not the most sacred ancestor," Eve added. "Not the Father of the World."

Mazurin, lost in misery, looked up. "But the mangel got him. Blodgett is gone." He touched his forelock absently.

"You're here," said Eve. "You know what the future is supposed to be like. You'll build Blodgett's world—with a few important changes."

"Oh," Mazurin said, suddenly realizing. "You'll put one of your men in Blodgett's place and I'll advise him on what I remember."

Charlie leaned over his chair. "One of our men—one of everybody's."

"Isn't it obvious?" asked Eve, squeezing Mazurin's arm. "The Father of the World, the most sacred ancestor, will be a descendant."

"He doesn't get it," Charlie said.

"You," Eve stated, "will be Blodgett."

Mazurin started to touch his forelock. "Me?" he asked dazedly, then finished the reverent gesture. He *was* an ancestor, after all.

—DAMON KNIGHT

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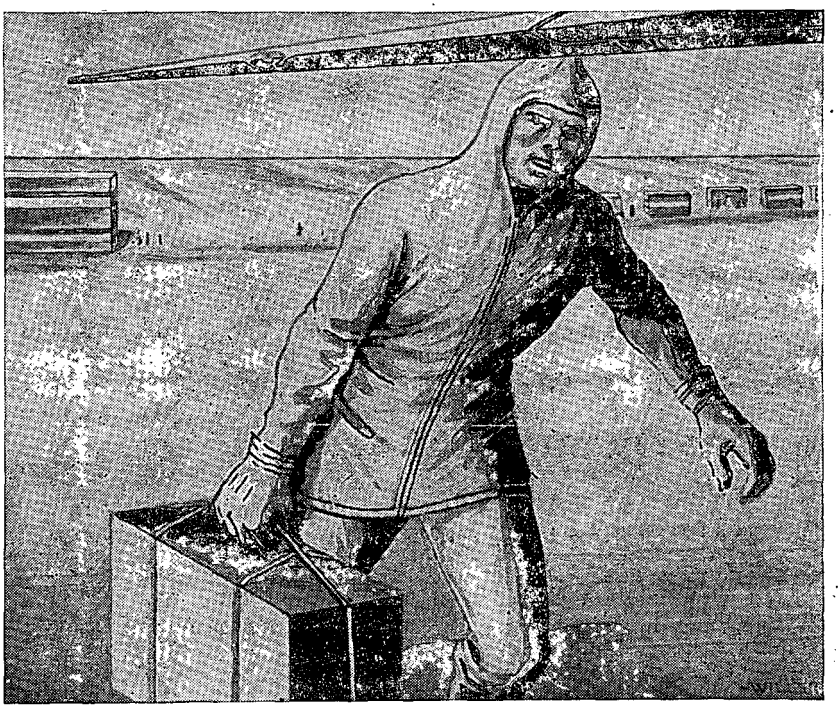
MARS CHILD



BY CYRIL JUDD

More than anything else, the colony on Mars wanted independence from doomed Earth—and abruptly was in deadly danger of succeeding!

Illustrated by WILLER

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Synopsis

FORTY years in the life of a planet is nothing—especially when that planet is ancient Mars. It has been that long since the first Earth rocket crashed at the southern apex of Syrtis Major; *almost that long since the first too-hopeful colonists followed, three thousand doomed souls, all dead before the delayed relief ship arrived.*

Forty years during which a barren world played host to, successively, a handful of explorers and a few score prospectors with naturally "Marsworthy" lungs; a thousand or so latter-day homesteaders with their lean, silent women; a dozen, then two dozen industrial settlements; and at last, almost forty years after the first failure, another attempt at permanent colonization.

Sun Lake City Colony is unique on Mars; it is a cooperative without industrial backing. Its members range from laborers to accomplished scientists, with one conviction in common: that Earth is through as a habitation for man because of its wrecked ecology, overcrowding, and the imminence of a cataclysmic radiological war. The Colony hopes as soon as possible to establish an agricultural cycle that will enable it to exist self-sufficiently on the hostile alien planet.

Until that goal is attained, and until the colonists can find an acceptable substitute for Earth-import

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OxEn—the "oxygen enzyme" pills that enable humans to breathe Mars air—Sun Lake must maintain business relations with Earth. To this end the Colony maintains a laboratory to refine and concentrate radiosotopes from Mars' naturally low-radioactive soil.

In Sun Lake, a baby boy is born to Jim *and* Polly Kandro, *a couple who emigrated partly to get away from the scene of half a dozen tragic miscarriages on Earth. The Colony's doctor,* Tony Hellman, *attends the birth; he is assisted by* Anna Willendorf, *who came to the Colony as a glassblower, but whose extraordinary quality of understanding and sympathy makes her an excellent part-time nurse.*

The baby is fitted to a specially designed oxygen mask. OxEn cannot be absorbed by infants, and the Colony lost its first-born baby because they could not produce enough oxygen to keep a full-size oxy tent operating. The child is named Sun Lake City Colony Kandro *by his proud parents—*Sunny *for short.*

Tony leaves the new mother and child in Anna's care, and goes to make his routine morning check of the Lab; he is radiological safety monitor for the Colony as well as doctor. While he is there, the Lab is visited by a delegation of the military.

Personally commanding the search party is Hamilton Bell, *Planetary Affairs Commissioner for the Panamerican World Federation—the top man on Mars—acting on a complaint made by* Hugo Brenner. *Brenner, a drug manufacturer, claims a priceless 100 kilograms of marcaine have been stolen from his factory. The marcaine "scent" was traced to a point near the Colony by means of an electronic device known as the Bloodhound, operated by a conscientious young officer,* Lt. Ed Nealey.

Bell, who has absolute dictatorial powers in intercolony matters, proposes a search which would ruin the Lab and contaminate ready-to-go shipments of radioactives. Tony and two other members of the Colony Council, Mimi Jonathan *and* Joe Gracey, *bargain with the Commissioner and accept a desperate alternative. They will be permitted to conduct their own search in their own way, but they must deliver both the thief and the stolen marcaine before Shipment Day—three weeks off—or the Colony will be sealed off by a military cordon for a period of six months while an official search is made. This is in accordance with an obsolete law formulated in the days of annual rockets. Now, however, Sun Lake, like all Mars, is geared to ninety-day rocket intervals; missing two shipments would be a catastrophic blow to the Colony's economy.*

Bell marches off with his soldiers, and Tony goes to make the daily rounds of his patients. He sees, among others, Joan Radcliff, a fa-

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natically idealistic colonist, who is slowly dying of a disease the doctor cannot even diagnose. At least he feels, if Bell's ultimatum spells the end of the Colony, it will save Joan's life. Nothing short of that would send her back to Earth, for if she went the Colony would not allow her husband, Hank, to stay. Hank is a romantic youngster; going to Mars was his life's dream, but Sun Lake, with its dreams of permanence, has room only for "married or marriageable" members.

Tony also sees Nick Cantrella, *the fourth member of the Council. Nick is an inspired electronics man and machinist, and an inveterate optimist. Between them, they work out a plan to test everyone in the Colony for exposure to marcaine by means of the electro-encephalograph. Among those tested, in addition to all the colonists except the two bed-ridden women (and Hank Radcliff, who is away, getting some new medicine for Joan), are* Learoyd, *an old prospector who happened to be in town that day, and the* Tollers, *an early homesteader couple who live nearby. But all the results are negative; they find no evidence of exposure. The next step in the search will be a house-to-house inspection of the Colony.*

Meanwhile, Sunny is having trouble nursing. The new mother becomes terribly worried, and when left alone for a short time, she has a dream or hallucination, and babbles hysterically to the doctor about a "Brownie" that was peering in the window at the baby.

The situation takes a sudden turn for the worse when Harve Stillman, *the chief radioman, turns up with unexpected news: the rocket is in radio range, and will land the next day—two weeks early!*

CHAPTER NINE

TONY got four hours' sleep before Tad Campbell came banging on his door at 3:15 A. M. The boy's enthusiasm was more than Tony could face; it would be easier to carry his own equipment than to answer questions while he was dressing. He sent Tad to wait at the plane and put some "coffee" on to brew, then did a last quick check of his portable health lab, making sure that there was nothing overlooked in the hasty preparations after the news about the Earth ship.

Gulping down the hot brew, he reviewed the instructions he had given Anna: feedings for Sunny Kandro; bacitracin for Dorothy; ointment and dressings for Joan, another injection if she needed it; and under no circumstances sedative for Mrs. Beyles.

He couldn't think of anything predictable he had failed to provide for. He folded the lab to make a large carrying case and lugged his burden up the gentle slope that led

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to the landing field where *Lazy Girl,* the Colony's transport plane, waited.

Bea Juarez was warming the icy motors with a blowtorch. *Lazy Girl's* motors were absurdly small; their shafts spun on zero-friction air bearings. Air-bearings dated from the guided missiles of 1950, but their expensively precise machining ruled them out for Earth. Shipping space to Mars was high enough to override the high manufacturing cost. Air-bearing motors were small and light; therefore virtually everything on Mars that turned or slid, turned and slid on molecules of gas instead of oily films.

The bearings improved the appearance not only of machinery but of mechanics. Bea looked tired, cold, and unhappy; but she lacked the grease-smeared dinginess that would have marked her on Earth. The girl nodded to him, ran a hand over the moisture condensing on the metallic surface, and applied the torch to a new spot.

She shook her head doubtfully. "Don't blame me if she falls apart in mid-air after we take off. I put her together with spit overnight, Tony. She was scattered all over the field for a hundred-hour check. You'd think they'd let you know . . ." she grumbled, then broke off and grinned. "What the hell, if we blow up halfway between here and there, we don't have to worry about marcaine any more! Climb aboard, Doc." She snapped off the torch. "Hey, Tad! The doc needs a hand with his contraption."

TONY felt a twinge of conscience as Tad hopped out of the plane and ran to take the big box. It must have been a blow to the boy, to be deprived of carrying the heavy equipment from the hospital.

"How's it going?" Tony asked genially, "You seem to be getting along fine without your tail bone."

"Okay," the boy grunted.

He eased the box into the cabin, pulled it out of the way, and reached down a condescending hand to help Tony. "It don't seem to matter," he added, when the doctor was inside. "You'd never know it wasn't there."

Tad was the recent victim of an unhappily humorous accident. Butted in the seat by an angry goat, he'd had his coccyx severely fractured, and the doctor had had to remove the caudal vertebrae. It probably qualified, Tony thought, as another of those history-making occasions—the Colony's first spinal, if you want to stretch the term, operation. Historic or not, it was a permanent bond between the boy and the doctor—the only one who had been able to take it seriously.

Tony padded a couple of spare parkas into a comfortable couch on the cabin floor and stretched out. The plane had no seats. Coming

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back, they'd sit on the bare floor, and the parkas would have another use. The ship was unheated and the newcomers weren't likely to have warm clothes unpacked.

Lazy Girl was short on comfort and speed cannibalized on Mars from the scrapped remains of obsolete models discarded by wealthier colonies. Tony, who didn't fly himself, had been told that she handled easily and flew an immense payload without complaining.

Tad had built himself a luxurious nest of parkas. He pulled the last one up around his shivering shoulders, leaned back, and examined the interior of the plane with a good imitation of a practiced appraisal.

"Nice job," he pronounced finally. "You don't get them like this back on Earth."

"You sure don't," Bea agreed ironically from the pilot's seat. "Hold on to your hat. Here we go!"

Say what you like about Mars, about the Colony, about the poor old relic of a plane, Tony thought, when you took a look at the kids you began to understand what it was all about. A year ago, Tad had been a thoroughly obnoxious brat. But how could he be anything else on Earth?

THEY were all that way. You got born into a hate-thy-neighbor, envy-thy-neighbor, murder-thy-neighbor culture. In your infancy your overworked and underfed mother's breast was always withdrawn too soon and you were filled again and again, day after day, with blind and squalling rage. You were a toddler and you snatched at another one's bit of candy; you were hungry and you hated him; you fought him. You learned big boys' games—Killakraut, Wacka-wop, Nigger inna Graveyard, Chinks an' Good Guys, Stermation Camp, Loot the City. The odds were you were hungry, always hungry.

Naked dictatorship and leader worship, oligarchy and dollar-worship; sometimes one was worse, sometimes the other. The forms didn't matter; the facts did. Too many mouths, not enough topsoil. Middle classes with their relatively stable, relatively sane families were growing smaller and being ground out of existence as still more black dirt washed into the ocean and still more hungry mouths were born and prices went higher and higher—how long, in God's name, could it go on? How long before it blew up, and not figuratively speaking either?

The Panamerican World Federation, first with the most, refused to tolerate the production of mass-destruction weapons anywhere else in the world. Long calloused to foreign mutterings; the Western colossus would at irregular intervals fire off a guided missile on the advice of one of its swarm of in-

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telligence agents. In Tartary or France or Zanzibar, then, an innocent-looking structure would go up in a smoke mushroom. But they never stopped trying, and some day Tartary or France or Zanzibar would launch a missile of its own and it would mean nothing less than the end of the world in fire and plague as the rocket trails laced continents together and the bombers rained botulisn, radiocobalt and flasks of tritium with bikinis in their cores.

THE damned, poverty-ridden, swarming Earth! Short of food, short of soil, short of water, short of metals—short of everything except vicious, universal resentments and aggressions bred by the other shortages. . . .

That's what they were running from, the new arrivals he was going to meet today. He hoped there wouldn't be any more communicable disease carriers to quarantine at Marsport and fire back on the return trip without even a look around. There were supposed to be six medical examinations between the first application filed at the Sun Lake Society office in New York, and embarcation. But things must have got appreciably worse on Earth since—he started a little at the thought—"since his time." It seemed that now anybody could be reached. They used to say everybody had his price. Maybe it was true. He'd never had a chance to turn down a really big bribe, so he couldn't say. But if six boards of doctors could all be fixed, everybody's price must have taken a drastic slump.

Tad, sound asleep, rolled onto his stomach and humped up his behind, scene of the history-making operation, in a brief reversion to infancy.

"How come the rocket's getting in early?" Bea called back. "I didn't even have time to ask Harve about it last night, with the *Girl* spread out all over the field."

"Something about the throat liner. They have a new remote control servicing apparatus on Earth," Tony said. "Gets the liner out and cleaned and in faster. We save two weeks on each trip, and get an extra trip—what is it?—every two years?"

"Year and a half," Bea corrected. She was silent a moment, then snorted, "Rockets!"

"At least," Tony dead-panned, "rockets give you a smooth ride. Fat chance of getting any sleep in this pile . . ."

"The *Girl* never gave you a rough trip in your life!" she interrupted angrily. She pulled on the stick and swung the *Girl* into a downwind.

The doctor drowsily studied her, silhouetted against the stars through the windshield. She was attached to the old crate—ought to find herself a husband. It had looked like her and Flexner for a while, but then

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the chemist had paired off with Verna Blau. As the motor warmed up, Bea unzipped her parka and shrugged out of it. Definitely, Tony decided, the best shape in Sun Lake. Trim, fined-down, athletic, but no doubt at all, from this angle, that the figure was feminine—even under the bulky sweater she still wore.

HE LAY back on his improvised couch and reflected on how pleasant it would be to stand behind her and run his hands down over her shoulders—infinitely pleasant just to stand behind her while she flew the ship. Pleasant but impractical. Play hell with her Estimated Time of Arrival at Marsport, for one thing, and, to take a longer view, he probably would end up by marrying her—her and *Lazy Girl*: the two went together.

Tony stirred uncomfortably. While he was thinking idly goatish thoughts about Bea, Anna had turned up in his mind, with a half-smile on her face. It was typical, he thought, puzzled; Anna never intruded until the moment you wanted her . . . *if* you wanted her, he added unhappily, giving the verb a new meaning. Anna's smile was a tingling mystery; her dark eyes were wells of warmth in which a man could lose himself; but after all these months, he wasn't sure of their color. And even when she crept into his mind, it was only from the neck up that he visualized her.

That wasn't the way he saw Bea. Tony shook himself, stretched out and let his eyes linger on the girl in the pilot's seat until he fell asleep.

ii

THE sun was up when Bea eased the freighter in among more planes than they had ever seen before on Arrival Day. They recognized the elegant staff-carrier from Sun Lake's neighbor, Pittco Three, but didn't know the other twelve that were parked.

"Swell ride, Bea," said the doctor. "Now what is *this* dress parade all about . . .? Oh, sure. Douglas Graham is going to gunth Mars. These should be the bigshots from the commercial colonies."

"I hate these damned superficial gunthers," Bea said fiercely. "Is he going to bother Sun Lake?"

"Nick thinks he might zip through at the end of his tour, if he has time." He hopped to the ground, Tad following with the boxed lab. "You've got the shopping list, Bea?" the doctor asked. "I have to go over to the Ad Building. Don't think I'll have time for anything else. Can you get all the stuff?"

"Sure," she said easily. "We're not buying much this time."

Tony ignored the bitter significance of the remark. "We'll see you later, then. I hope this red-carpet business for Graham doesn't slow

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things up too much. I'd like to get back before lunch."

Tad was fidgeting next to him, waiting for a chance to break in.

A year ago, the boy had spent two days in Marsport, when he arrived with his family and the other founding members of the Colony. Then he had nothing more than a pitying sneer for the village of 600 people; now it was a place of wonder.

"Dr. Tony," he asked eagerly, "can we go to the Arcade?"

"We can go *through* it," Tony decided.

The Arcade was Aladdin's cave to Tad. To the Planetary Affairs Commission, which rented out booth space in the ramshackle building, it was a source of revenue. To Tony it was the stronghold of the irrepressible small retailer, who found his way even to Mars with articles he could buy cheap and sell dear . . . a reminder of the extent to which Mars was already taking over the social and economic patterns of Earth.

Booths at the Arcade did not display radiation counters, hand tools, welders, rope, radio, aluminum I-beams, airplane parts or half-tracks. Those you bought at the P. A. C. Stores, which were reliable, conservative and dull.

At the Arcade there was one booth which sold nothing but coffee in the cup: MARTIAN $2.00; EARTHSIDE $15.00 (WITH SUGAR $25.00). Tony knew the privateer who ran this concession might be ruined by another arrival aboard today's racket, landing in paper-light clothes with his garment and personal luggage allowance taken up by bricks of Earthside coffee and sugar, burning to undercut the highwayman who had beaten him to the happy hunting grounds of Mars.

At another booth the most beautiful collie, boxer and English shepherd pups were for sale at the astounding price of only twenty dollars each. The catch was that the proprietor of this booth was the only merchant on Mars with a stock of dog food.

AT ANOTHER booth Tad's jaw dropped with perplexity. "Dr. Tony, what are those?" he asked.

"Underwear, Tad. For women."

"But don't they get *cold* in those things?"

"Well, they would if they went out and worked like our women. But—well, for instance in Pittco, over the Rimrock Hills from us, there are some ladies who only work indoors, where it's heated."

"*All* heated? Not just beam heat on the beds and things?"

"I'm afraid I don't really know. Say! Look at those boots there—aren't they something?"

"Boy!" The boots were mirror-shiny zipper jobs. "What I wouldn't give for a pair of those! Put 'em on when new kids come in, and then watch them try to walk

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around in Earth sandals, and get a load of that sand."

Here on Mars, the price put the boots infinitely far out of reach for a boy like Tad, even if Sun Lake's policies did not prevent the purchase of such an item. Some supervisor in an industrial colony, Tony thought, would eventually acquire them as illusion of escape from the sands of Mars.

And that reminded him. He turned to Tad.

"By the way, what do you know about kids going barefoot around the colony? When did that start?"

"Barefoot?" Tad looked outraged. "What do you think we are —dopes?"

"I think," Tony answered drily, "that anybody who'd go strolling around the Rimrock caves without boots on is about as much of a jackass as he can be."

"In the *caves?*" This time Tony thought he detected a note of more honest horror. All the kids went barefoot sometimes in the experimental fields; everybody knew about it and pretended not to. The kids were pretty careful about not stepping on marked planted rows, and the fields had been processed to remove native poison-salts from the soil.

"Listen, Dr. Tony," Tad said earnestly, "if any of the kids are doing that, I'll put a stop to it! They ought to know better! *You* remember that time you had to fix my hand, before the—uh—other thing, when I just thought I'd pick up a piece of rock and it practically sliced my finger off! They shouldn't be walking barefoot around there."

"I remember." Tony smiled. "'Sliced your finger off' is a slight exaggeration, but I wouldn't like to have to handle a mess of feet like that. If you know who's doing it, you tell them I said to cut it out . . . or they may not be walking at all after a while."

"I'll let them know." Tad walked along silently, ignoring the bright displays as they passed, and Tony seized the chance to direct their footsteps out of the Arcade. "Dr. Tony," the boy said finally, "you didn't mean for me to tell you who it was in case I knew, did you?"

"Lord, no!" The doctor *had* been hoping to find out. But he realized now what an error he'd almost made.

A year ago, Tad had been as miserable a little snitch and talebearer as Earth could produce. "I just want it stopped, that's all."

"Okay, then." Tad's face relaxed into a friendly grin. "It will be."

We've got to keep going, the doctor thought. For himself, for the other adults, it didn't matter so much. But for the kids . . .

iii

TONY had absolutely no respect for Nowton, the P.A.C. medical officer, because Nowton was stupid. Fortunately Nowton was so stupid

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that he didn't realize this and greeted the Sun Lake medic joyfully.

"Hear you been up to tricks, boy! Why didn't you come to me instead? I got ways to get marcaine!"

"Glad to hear it, and I'll bet you do. While we were stealing that marcaine, we also had a baby. Got a form?"

"Corporal!" yelled Nowton. "Birth form!" A noncom produced the piece of official paper and Tony filled it in, checking weight and other data with notes in his pocket.

"That hot pilot of yours still around?" asked Nowton.

"Bea Juarez? Sure. Interested? Just tell her that her plane's a disgusting old wreck and you'll get her a new one. She always falls for that line."

"No kidding?"

"Who'd kid you, Nowton? Say, is Ed Nealey anywhere?"

"In the signal room. Where's Juarez, did you say?"

"I'll see you, Nowton." Tony hurried off.

HE FOUND the lieutenant reading a medical journal which had passed through his own hands months earlier, on its way around the joint subscription club of which both men were members. The club made it possible for them, in common with twenty-odd fellow-members on Mars, to keep up with technical and scientific publications without paying ruinous amounts in interplanetary postage.

"Hello, Ed."

Nealey put out his hand. "I didn't know whether you'd still be talking to me, Tony."

"Hell, you don't give the orders. You have to play it the way Bell calls it. Ed, off the record—you're pretty sure it was one of our people?"

"All I'm sure of, it wasn't a phony. To qualify with the Bloodhound on Earth, we had to follow made trails—where they dragged bags of aniseed over the spoor. You can tell the difference. This one faded and wobbled like the real thing. And we lost it not more than a couple of miles out of your place, headed straight your way. Tony, have you *searched?*"

"Some. We're not done yet." The doctor lowered his voice. "What's the matter with Commissioner Bell, Ed? Does he have anything special against us?"

The lieutenant jerked his chin a little at a Pfc sitting with earphones on his head, reading a comic book, and led the doctor into the corridor.

"God, what a post!" he said. "Tony, all I know is that Bell's a lost soul outside the Insurantist Party's inner circle. He had fifteen years of being looked up to as the Grand Old Man of the Mexicalifornia rizonan Insurantists, and now he's been booted to Mars. He'd do anything, I believe, to get

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back into the party. And don't forget that Brenner's been a heavy contributor to the Insurantist campaign funds during the last three elections. You know I'm professional military and I'm not supposed to and don't want to have anything to do with politics—"

Commissioner Bell came stumping down the corridor. "Lieutenant Nealey," he interrupted.

Nealey came to as casual an attitude of attention as his years of drilling would allow.

"Surely you have better things to do with your time than palavering with persons suspected of harboring criminals."

"Dr. Hellman is my friend, sir!"

"Very interesting. I suggest you go on about your duties and pick your friends more discriminatingly."

"Whatever you say, *sir.*" With slow deliberation, the lieutenant turned and shook Tony's hand. "I'm on duty now," he said tightly. "I'll see you around. So long, kid." He put his hand on Tad's shoulder, wheeled about smartly, and turned back into the signal room.

"Come on, Tad," said the doctor. "We're all done here. We might as well get out to the rocket field."

CHAPTER TEN

THEY were approaching the rocket field and what was, for Mars, an immense crowd—some five hundred people behind a broad white deadline marked on the tamped dirt of the field. It was an odd-looking crowd because it was not jammed into the smallest possible space, body to body, Earth-fashion. The people stood separately, like forest trees, with a good square meter around each of them. It was a Mars crowd, made up of people with lots of room. Tony stopped well away from the fringe of the group.

"This looks like a good spot," he decided. "Put the box down there; we can start setting things up."

"Doctor Hellman—hello!" A tall man, fully dressed in Earthside business clothes, strolled over. Tony had seen him only once before, when he had appeared at the Lab with Bell to make his monstrous accusation of theft. But Hugo Brenner was not an easy man to forget.

"Hello," Tony said shortly, and turned back to his box.

"Thought you might be here today." Brenner ignored the doctor's movement away from him, and went on smoothly. "I want to tell you how sorry I am about what happened. Frankly, if I'd known the trail would lead to your place, I might have thought twice before I called copper—but you understand, it's not the first time. I've let it go before. This time they took so much I couldn't very well overlook it."

"I understand perfectly," Tony assured him. "We disapprove of theft at Sun Lake too."

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"Well, I'm glad to hear you don't take it personally, Doctor. As a matter of fact, I'm almost glad it happened. I've heard a lot about you and the kind of job you've been doing over there. I wish we could have met under more pleasant circum—"

"It's very kind of you to say so," Tony interrupted, deliberately misunderstanding. "I didn't think a man in your position would be much impressed by what we're doing at Sun Lake."

Brenner smiled. "I think Sun Lake is a very interesting experiment," he said in a monotone that clearly expressed his lack of interest. "What I had in mind . . ."

"Of course, Mr. Brenner." Whatever the drug man had to say to him personally, the doctor did not wish to hear it. "We realize your only interest is in the recovery of your stolen goods. We're doing our best to find the thief . . . *if* he really is a member of our Colony, that is."

"Please, Doctor, don't put words in my mouth. Naturally I'm interested in recovering my goods, but I'm not worried about it. I'm quite sure your people will turn up the guilty party." Again his voice carried a flat lack of conviction.

"Commissioner Bell has seen to it that we turn up *a* guilty party," Tony retorted.

"I think the Commissioner was unnecessarily harsh." Hugo Brenner shrugged it off. "If it had been up to me . . . well, that's Bell's job; I suppose he has to handle it his own way. Let's quit beating around the bush, Doctor. I came over here to offer you a job, not to talk . . ."

"No."

"Suppose you listen to my offer first."

"No!"

"All right, then. Name your own terms. I'll meet your price. I need a doctor. A good one."

"I don't want to work for you at any price."

Brenner's mouth turned up at the corners. Obviously he enjoyed the game, and equally obviously he thought he was going to win.

"LET me mention a figure." He moved closer. "One million dollars a year."

Well, thought the doctor, now he had a clearer idea of what his own price was; now he knew it wasn't a million dollars. Ten times what he made in a peak year on Earth. He looked full into Brenner's smirking face, and knew something else: he hadn't been so clear-through boiling mad in a long time; and he was fed up with diplomacy. Deliberately, he raised his voice: "Didn't you hear me before, Brenner? Or didn't you understand?"

He found it was gratifying to notice people turning his way, edging in to listen.

"Let me make myself absolutely clear," he went on loudly. "I don't

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want to work for you. I don't like the business you're in. I know what you need a doctor for, and so does everyone else on Mars. If your boys over at Hop Heaven can't keep their noses out of your marcaine, that's not my worry. I don't want to be resident physician in a narcotics factory. Stay away from me!"

The smirk had left Brenner's face; it was ugly, contorted, and much too close. Tony realized, too late, that Brenner's fist was even closer. Abruptly, he stopped feeling like a hero and began to feel like a fool.

Then, quite suddenly, Brenner's fist was no longer approaching, and Brenner was flat on the ground. Tony tried to figure out what had happened. It didn't make sense. He became aware of a ring of grinning congratulatory faces surrounding him, and of Tad next to him, giggling gleefully. He called to the boy curtly, turned on his heel, and walked back the few steps to his portable lab.

Nobody helped Brenner to his feet. He must have got up by himself, because when Tony looked back, out of the corner of his eye, Brenner was gone.

A short man bustled up. "I heard that, Dr. Hellman. I didn't see you hit him, but I heard you tell him off." He pumped Tony's hand delightedly.

"Hello, Chabrier." That makes two of us, Tony thought—I didn't see myself hit him either. "Look, I know it's no use asking you not to talk about it, but go easy, will you? Don't blow it up too much when you tell it."

"It needs no amplification. You slap his face in challenge. He reaches for a weapon. You knock him unconscious with a single blow! You tell him: 'Hugo Brenner, there is not gold enough—' "

"Knock off, will you?" begged the doctor. "He wanted me to work over at his place by Syrtis Major—Brenner Pharmaceuticals Corporation, whatever he calls it. You know all his people get a marcaine craving from the stuff that leaks out of his lousy machinery. He wanted me there to keep giving his boys cures. I said no and he offered me a lot of money and I got sore. I shot off my mouth. He started to sock me and—"

And what? Tony still hadn't figured that out. He turned back to the box, still only half set up.

Chabrier said thoughtfully: "So you know that much, eh? Then you know it's nothing new, this business of missing marcaine?"

TONY abruptly turned back to him, no longer uninterested. "Brenner said something about previous thefts. What's it all about?"

"Only what you said yourself." Chabrier shrugged. "What did he offer you? Three hundred thousand? Four?" He paused, and when Tony made no reply, went on: "You can get better than that. It

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would be cheaper than junking his plant and building a new one."

"I know I can get better than that," the doctor said impassively. "What do you know about the missing marcaine, Chabrier?"

"NOTHING all of Marsport doesn't know. Was it in the neighborhood of half a million? That would be much less than the freight rates for new machines. He's used to freight being only a small part of his overhead. He ships a concentrated product." Chabrier chuckled happily. "How it must hurt when he thinks of importing plate and tubes and even, God forbid, *castings*. I tell you, a man doesn't *know* what freight can mean until he's handled liquor. Bulk is bad. Even just running the bulk liquor into the glass-lined tanks of the rocket ships is bad. It means that Mars ships water to Earth! *Actually!* But the foolish laws say we cannot dehydrate, let the water be added on Earth, and still label it Mars liquor."

"Please," said Tony wryly. "Please, Chabrier!"

The man shrugged. "So we take a *little* of the water out—fifty per cent, say. Water is water, they pour it in on Earth, nobody knows, nobody cares. Bulk shipment is still bad, very bad. But bottles! Dr. Hellman, there is no known way of dehydrating a glass bottle. We ship them in, we fill them, we ship them back. They break, people steal them here and aboard ship, and at the Earth rocket port. All so the label can say 'Bottled on Mars'!"

"Muffle your sobs, Chabrier. I happen to know that people pay for Mars liquor and pay a great deal for bottled-on-Mars. At least, you're legal, and I understand you make good stuff."

"I drink it myself," said Chabrier righteously.

"To save the freight on Earthside rye?" Tony grinned, then asked seriously, "Listen, Chabrier, if you know anything about this marcaine business that we don't, for God's sake, spill it! We . . . I don't have to tell you how hard this thing is hitting us out at Sun Lake. *What* does all of Marsport know?"

"Was it perhaps seven-fifty?" the other man asked blandly.

Fair exchange, Tony decided. "A million," he said.

"*So?* This I do not understand! Why so much for a doctor, if he is to have a new plant?" Chabrier shook his head, shrugged, and went on more briskly: "I have told you already, if you understand: Brenner needs a new plant. His machines are no good. They leak. His men inhale the micron dust, they get the craving, and they start to steal the product. Soon they are no good for the work, and he sends them back to Earth. You see today how many new men he brings in? Then one day there is more marcaine missing. He . . ."

"One minute, Chabrier." Tony

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turned and signaled Tad to take a break, then moved off a few steps, and motioned to the other man to follow him. "You think it's a frameup?" he demanded in a low, intense voice.

"You would have me speak against our Commissioner Bell?" Chabrier asked with only the faintest trace of sarcasm showing. "Such a thing I will not do, but I beg of you to consider, if Sun Lake Colony should be bankrupt, their Laboratory must be sold at auction by the Commissioner, and such a plant would suit Mr. Brenner very well indeed. They say here in Marsport the machinery in this Laboratory is adaptable to many kinds of production. They say it is good, tight, well-built equipment, it will not leak. Till now it seemed quite clear." The little man shook his head doubtfully. "Now I do not know. A plant? Yes. A doctor? Yes. But *both* . . . and he offered a million! This I do *not* understand, unless he plans to work both plants. There is a rumor which has some currency today . . ."

THE deep bass booming of the warning horn cut him off. People began edging away from the center of the field, terminating conversations, rejoining their own groups.

"You will excuse me now? I must go," Chabrier said, when the horn died down enough to permit conversation again. "I have my place reserved, but they will not hold it . . ."

"Place?" Tony, still trying to catch up with the implications of the other man's news, didn't follow the quick shift. "What for? Oh, are you after Douglas Graham, too?"

"Of course. I understand he is—let us say, a drinker. If I can reach him before any of these other vultures . . . who knows? Maybe a whole chapter on Mars liquor!" He seized Tony's hand in a quick grasp of friendship. "Good luck, Doctor Hellman," he said, and dashed off, running ludicrously on his short legs to rejoin his own party before the landing.

Tony searched the sky; the rocket was not yet in sight. He got back to work, swiftly now, setting up his equipment. Chabrier had mentioned a rumor. Never mind, there was enough to think about.

The whole thing planned beforehand, to ruin Sun Lake. *Maybe.* Chabrier was notorious as a gossip and petty troublemaker. A frameup. *Maybe.* And how could they find out? Who was responsible? Who was innocent? Nealey, Nowton; Bell and Brenner; Chabrier with his fluid chatter and his shrewd little eyes. Nealey at least was a decent, competent man . . . . *Maybe.* But how could you tell? How could you single them out?

Parasites! he thought bitterly, the cheerful Chabrier as much as the arrogant Brenner. Mars liquor

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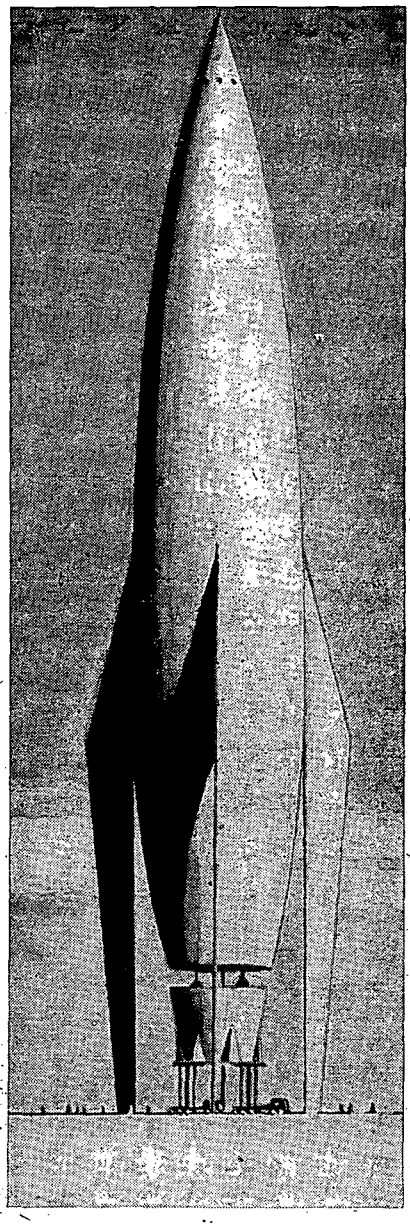
brought fantastic prices because it was distilled from mashes of Martian plants containing carbohydrates, instead of being distilled from mashes of Earth plants containing carbohydrates. And the friendly, plump little man got plumper on the profits culled from Earth's neurotic needs. It wasn't really much of an improvement on Brenner's marcaine business. A minor difference in moral values, but all of them were parasites as long as they didn't devote their time to the terrible problem of freeing Mars from the shadow of Earth's dominance.

And what about our Lab? Unquestionably, it was better to concentrate radioactive methylene blue for the treatment of cancerous kidneys than it was to concentrate alkaloids for Earthside gow-heads, but that, too, was only a difference in moral values. Parasites, all . . .

"The rocket!" yelled Tad.

CHAPTER ELEVEN

IT LOOKED like a bit of the sun at first; that was its braking blasts seen from under. The monster settled swiftly, roaring and flaring in a teasing mathematical progression of successively shorter blasts more closely spaced. When you could see its silvery bulk in profile it was going *pop-pop-pop-pop-pop,* like a machine gun. It settled with a dying splutter and stood on the field some two hun-



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dred meters from the crowd like a remembered skyscraper.

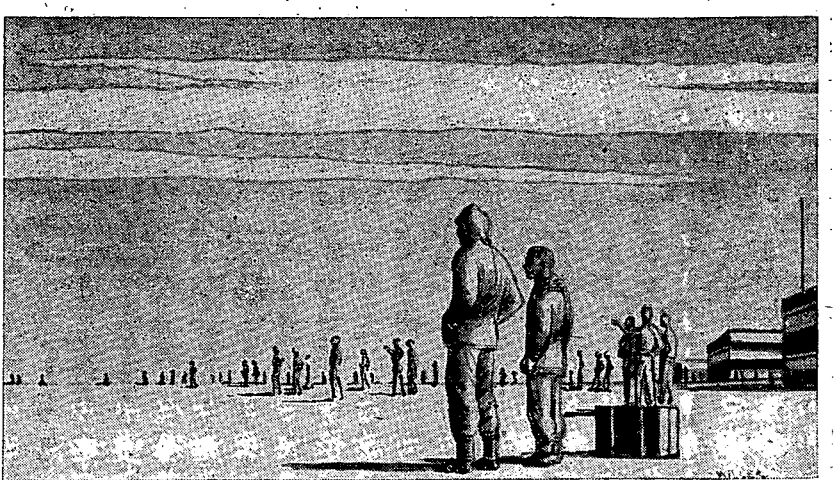
Trucks raced out to meet it. Inside, the doctor knew, crewmen were walking around capstans that fitted over and unscrewed ten kilogram hex-nuts. The trucks slowed and crawled between the fins on which the rocket stood, directly under its exhaust nozzle. Drivers cut and filled to precise positions; then platforms jacked up from the crane trucks to receive the rim of the rocket's throat. Men climbed the jacks to fasten them.

The captain must have radioed from inside the ship; the last of the first hex-nuts was off. Motor away! Slowly the platforms descended, taking the reaction engine with them. The crane trucks crawled off, two ants sharing an enormous burden.

The crew inside was busy again, dismantling fuel tanks, while the trucks moved to the inspection and repair shed off the field. A boom lifted off the motor, and the drivers scuttled back to receive the first installment of the fuel tanks, the second, the third and the last.

"Now do the people come out?" asked Tad.

"If the rocket hasn't got any more plumbing, they do," Tony told him. "Yes—here we go." Down between the fins descended a simple elevator, the cargo hoist letting down a swaying railed platform on a cable. It was jammed with people. The waiting port officer waved them toward the Administration Building. The crowd, which had overflowed gently past the broad white line on the field, drifted that way, too.



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"Stanchions! Get stanchions out!" the port officer yelled. Two field workers broke out posts and a rope that railed off the crowd from the successive hoist-loads of people herded into the Administration Building for processing. There was a big murmur at the third load—*Graham!* The doctor was too far back to get a good look at the great man.

The loudspeaker on top of the building began to talk in a brassy rasp:

"Brenner Pharmaceuticals. Baroda, Schwartz, Hopkins, W. Smith, Avery for Brenner Pharmaceuticals," it said. Brenner ducked under the rope to meet five men issuing from the building. He led them off the field, talking earnestly and with gestures.

"Pittco! Miss Kearns for Pittco Three!"

A pretty girl stepped through the door and looked about helplessly. A squat woman strode through the crowd, took the girl by the arm and led her off.

Radiominerals Corporation got six replacements; Distillery Mars got a chemist and two laborers; Metro Films got a cameraman who would stay and a pair of actors who would be filmed against authentic backgrounds and leave next week with the prints. A squad of soldiers headed by a corporal appeared and some of the field workers let out a cheer; they were next for rotation. Brenner got two more men; Kelly's Coffee Bar got Mrs. Kelly, bulging with bricks of coffee and sugar.

"Sun Lake City Colony," said the loudspeaker. "W. Jenkins, A. Jenkins, R. Jenkins, L. Jenkins, for Sun Lake."

"Watch the box," Tony called to Tad as he strode off.

HE PICKED up the identification and authorization slips waiting for him at the front desk inside, and examined them curiously. Good, he thought, a family with kids. The loudspeaker was now running continuously. Two more for Chabrier, three engineers for Pittco Headquarters in Marsport.

A uniformed stewardess came up to him.

"Dr. Hellman? From Sun Lake?" Her voice was professionally melodious. He nodded. "These are Mr. and Mrs. Jenkins." She turned to the family group behind her. "And Bobby and Louise Jenkins," she added, smiling.

The kids were about seven and four years old respectively. Tony smiled down at them, shook hands with their parents, and presented his authorizations to the stewardess.

"—Prentiss, Skelly and Zaretsky for Sun Lake," the loudspeaker called.

"Excuse me, I'll be right back," Tony said and headed back to the desk.

They gave him more authorization slips. He riffled through the

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papers quickly as he headed back to find the Jenkinses and wait for the newcomers. All different names. Only one family, the rest singles. Too bad.

He hunted through his pockets and found two packets of peanuts, mutated beyond recognition into chewy objects with a flavor something like grape pop.

By the time Bobby and Lou had overcome their shyness enough to accept the gifts, another stewardess was bringing up the rest of the group destined for Sun Lake.

"Dr. Hellman?" Her voice was as much like the first stewardess' as her uniform, but according to ancient custom this one was blonde and the other brunette. "Miss Skelly, Miss Dantuono, Mr. Graham, Mr. Prentiss, Mr. Bond, Mr. Zaretsky," she said and vanished.

Tony nodded and shook hands all around.

"Let's get out of here," he said. "It's quieter outside and I have to give you all a physical checkup, so—"

"Again?" one of the men groaned. "We just had one on board."

"I think I've had a million different shots since I started all this," the other girl put in. What was her name? Dantuono? "Do we get more needles?"

"I'm afraid so. We have to be careful, you know." Some day he would meet a rocket, and nobody—but nobody—would make that particular remark. Or perhaps that was too much to hope for. "Let's get out of here," Tony said again. He offered his hands to the children, and they started moving.

BY THE time they reached Tad and the box that held the portable health lab, the crowd was already thinning out.

"We'll get right to it," the doctor addressed his group. "I'm sorry I can't examine you indoors under more comfortable circumstances, but I have to make a quick check before we can even let you on board the ship. It won't take long if we start right away."

"Doesn't the port have facilities for this sort of thing?" someone asked.

"Sure. They've got a beautiful setup right inside the Ad Building. Anybody can use it. Sun Lake can't afford the price."

He called them up one at a time, starting with the Jenkinses, parents and then children, so the kids wouldn't have too much time to get apprehensive about the needles. His trained reflexes went through the business of blood and sputum tests, eye-ear-nose-and-throat, fluoroscopy, and nervous-and-mental, while he concentrated on getting acquainted.

Names began to attach themselves to faces. He finished with the two single girls, and started on the men. The big, red-faced one was Zaretsky; skinny little bookkeeper

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type was Prentiss. The talkative one was Graham.

"First name?" Tony was filling in the reports while the samples went through analysis.

"Douglas."

"Drop-in or shares?"

"Drop-in, I guess. On Earth we call it the working press."

"Press?" Tony looked up sharply. "*The* Douglas Graham?"

"The *This Is* man. Didn't you know I was coming out?" Tony hesitated, and Graham asked quickly, "Your place *is* open to the press, isn't it?"

"Oh, sure. We just—well, frankly, we didn't think you'd bother with us. Certainly didn't think you'd come to us first. We'd have rolled out the red carpet." He grinned and pointed to the array of planes at the other end of the field; for the first time, he became aware of the curious and envious stares their small group was receiving from passersby. "Everybody else did. I guess we were about the only outfit on Mars that didn't at least *hope* to bring you back home today." He turned his attention to the checkup form. "Age?"

"Thirty-two."

FROM appearance and general condition, Tony would have given the journalist ten more years; it was a shock to find that they were both the same age. He finished without further comment and went on to the next and last, a lanky blond youth named Bond. By the time he was done, the analyses and reaction tests were complete.

The doctor checked them over carefully. "You're all right," he announced to the group at large. "We can get started now."

It was a slow trip. None of the newcomers were accustomed to the low gravity; they were wearing heavy training boots acquired on board the rocket. And all of them were determined to see everything that was to be seen in Marsport before they took off. Tony led them across the spaceport field, and down the main street of Marsport, a mighty boulevard whose total length was something under five hundred yards, the distance from the space-port to the landing strip.

He answered eager questions about the ownership and management of the hotels and office building that lined the block adjacent to the spaceport. These were mostly privately owned and privately built, constructed of glass brick. The native product had a sparkling multicolored sheen that created a fine illusion of wealth and high fashion —even when you knew that no building made of the stuff could possibly stand more than ten years: the same slightly different chemical content of Martian potash that produced the lustrous coloration of the bricks made them particularly susceptible to the damaging effects of wind and sand. Glass brick construction was, by far, more costly

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than the rammed-earth buildings at Sun Lake, or the scrap-shanties that characterized the Pittco camp across the Rimrock Hills from the Colony; but it was still much less expensive than the Earth-import steel and alumalloy used wherever strength and durability were important.

THE Administration Building of the Planetary Affairs Commission, which occupied one entire side of the center block, was sheathed in a muted green alumalloy; the P.A.C. Stores and official P.A.C. hotel, across the street, were respectively dull rose and dove gray. The doctor pointed out each building in turn to his wide-eyed group. The writer was as eager as any of the others, and asked as many questions. Tony was surprised; he had anticipated a bored sophistication.

Graham responded equally unpredictably to the series of interruptions they met with en route. Chabrier was first, even before they had left the spaceport. He dashed up to pump Tony's hand and babble that he was delighted to see him again, and how well Tony looked despite his drab sojourn in the so-dull Sun Lake where *nothing* ever happened.

"But this is Mr. Graham, isn't it?" he exclaimed in delight.

"Yeah," said the writer dryly.

"How fortunate! Distillery Mars, my concern, small but interesting, happens to be preparing a new run of Mars liquor, 120 proof—we should be so honored if you could make a point of sampling our little effort, shall we say this afternoon? I have *comfortable*—" a sidelong glance at Tony—"transportation here."

"Maybe later."

"To a connoisseur of your eminence, of course, we should think it a privilege to offer you an honorarium—"

"Maybe later, maybe not," grunted the writer.

Chabrier only shrugged and smiled; the gunther could say no wrong. "You will perhaps be pleased to accept a small sample of the product of Mars Distillery?" The little man held up a gaudily wrapped package. He pressed the gift into Graham's indifferent grasp, wrung Tony's hand warmly, said heartily, "We will look forward to see you soon," and departed.

Halliday of Mars Machine Tool was next. His manner was more that of a man inviting a guest to his country club, but he *did* mention that MMT would, of course, expect to provide for a writer's necessary expenses. Graham cut off Halliday's bluff assurances as curtly as he had stopped Chabrier's outpourings. It was like that all the way.

Everybody who was anybody on Mars was in town that day, and each of them managed to happen on the Sun Lake crowd somewhere along the road from the spaceport to the landing strip.

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THOSE who met Tony at any time in the past were all determined to stop him for a chat; then they noticed Graham, and extended a coincidental but warm invitation. Those who were unacquainted with Sun Lake's doctor were forced to be more direct, and the bribe was sometimes even more marked than Chabrier's or Halliday's offers.

Graham was cold and even nasty to them. But once he took Tony's arm and said: "Wait. I see an old friend." Commissioner Bell was up ahead, striding toward the Administration Building.

"Him?" asked Tony.

"Yeah. Hey, Commish!"

Bell stopped as if he had been shot. He turned slowly toward Graham, and stood his ground as the writer approached. When he spoke, there was cold hatred in his voice. "Just the company I'd expect you to keep, Graham. Stay out of trouble. I'm the man in charge here, and don't think I'm afraid of you."

"You weren't the last time," said Graham. "That was your big mistake—Commish."

Bell walked away without another word.

"You shot his blood pressure up about 20 millimeters," said Tony. "What's it all about?"

"I claim a little credit for sending Bell to Mars, Doc. I caught him with his fingers in the till up to his shoulder, at a time when his political fences were down, if you don't mind a mixed metaphor. I couldn't get him jailed, but I'll bet up here he sometimes wishes I had."

A wild hope flared in Tony. The *This Is* man was, sporadically, known as a crusader. Perhaps Graham's annoyance at the crude plays for attention meant that an appeal could be made on the basis of decency and fair play.

ii

BY THE time they reached the plane, Tad was already on the spot with the portable health lab stowed away, and Bea was warming up the motors.

"Hi!" she stuck her head out of the cockpit to grin at Tony. "Got everybody? Tad, hand out parkas to these people. Tony, they tell me you're a hero—had it out with big, bad Brenner in real style!" She didn't quite say: "I never thought you had it in you."

"Things get around, don't they? Bea, this is Douglas Graham. He's coming out to have a look at Sun Lake for a book he's doing. This is Bea Juarez," he told the writer. "She's our pilot."

Graham surveyed Bea. "I hope everything in the Colony looks as good."

"We'll be extra-careful to show you only the best," she retorted. "Hey, Tad, get that mink-lined parka, will you? We've got a guest to impress."

Tony was delighted. If everyone else in the Colony could take the

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Great Man in stride so easily, he would be pleased and very much surprised.

Tad came running up with a parka. "What kind did you say you wanted? This is the only one left, except Dr. Tony's."

The three adults burst into laughter, and Tad retreated, red-faced.

Graham called him back. "I'm going to need that thing if the temperature in the cockpit doesn't go up."

"You're going to need it anyhow," Tony assured him. "There's a lot to be said for *Lazy Girl* here, but she's not one hundred per cent airtight."

"I get the idea," the journalist assured him. "You people don't throw heat around, do you?"

"Not heat or anything else," replied Tony. "You'll see, if you can stick it out."

"What the hell, I was a war correspondent in Asia!"

"This isn't a war. There isn't anything exciting to make up for the discomfort—except, say, when a baby gets born—"

"No? I take it there was something going on just a little while ago. What were you saying about the doctor being a hero?" he called forward to Bea.

She shrugged. "All I know is what I hear on the grapevine."

Tony heaved a mental sigh of relief—too soon.

"I was there." Tad had stuck right by them. "This man Mr. Brenner came over and asked Dr. Tony to come work for him, and he wouldn't, and he tried to get him with a whole lot of money, but he still wouldn't, and—"

"HOLD on," Graham interrupted. "First thing you have to learn if you're going to be a reporter is to get your pronouns straight. This Brenner was doing the offering, and Doc was refusing; that right?"

"Sure. That was what I was saying—"

"Look, Tad, we were only kidding about impressing Mr. Graham," Tony said quickly. "You don't have to make a hero out of me. I just had a disagreement with someone," he said to Graham, "and they're trying to make a good story out of it."

"That's what I'm after," Graham came back, "a good story. Tell me everything that happened, Tad."

The boy looked doubtfully from the doctor to the guest and back again.

"All right," Tony gave in. "But let's not make a 15-round fight out of it, Tad. Tell it just the way it happened, if you've got to tell it."

"Just *exactly?*"

"Yes," the doctor said firmly, "just the way it happened."

"Okay." Tad was far from disappointed. If anything, he was gleeful. "So this Mr. Brenner wanted Dr. Tony to come work at his place, curing people from *drugs,* and he

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wouldn't, and Mr. Brenner kept pestering him till he got mad, and he said he didn't like him and wouldn't work for him no matter what—I mean, Dr. Tony said that to Mr. Brenner—and Mr. Brenner got *real* mad, and started to swing at him, and—"

"Well, don't stop *now*," Graham said. "Who won?"

"Well . . . then Mr. Brenner started swinging and—I stuck my foot out and tripped him, and Mr. Chabrier came over right away and said how wonderful it was the way Dr. Tony had socked Mr. Brenner, and I guess that's what everybody thought." He looked up at Tony's astonished face, and finished defensively, "Well, you *said* to tell it just the way it happened."

CHAPTER TWELVE

TONY fastened the hood of his parka more tightly around his head, as the chill air of flight crept into the cabin. Graham, beside him, was full of flip comment and curiosity, to which ordinary decency, let alone special diplomacy, demanded reply. But Tony shifted position and let his eyelids drop closed.

There was no mental eye to close and so thrust out the revised memory of the ridiculous incident with Brenner, nor any mental ear that could turn off the resounding echo of Bea Juarez' hilarity.

You knew all along you never hit Brenner, didn't you? he asked himself angrily. *You could have figured it out for yourself—if you wanted to! All right, then, don't think about that.*

The new colonists . . . he ought to do something about them, something to dispel the tense, apprehensive silence in the cabin. A speech of welcome, something like that.

Thank them for coming? Welcome them to Sun Lake? With the threat that hung over them all, new members and old, any speech like that would be ridiculous. Later in the day, they would be asked to sign final papers, turning over, once and for all, the funds they had already placed in the hands of the trustees on Earth, and receiving their full shares in the Colony. Before then they would learn the worst; they would be told about the accusation that might doom the Colony. But how could he tell them now, before they had ever seen Sun Lake, before they had glimpsed the spellbinding stretches of *Lacus Solis,* or had a chance to understand the promise implicit in the Lab's shining walls, in Joe Gracey's neatly laid out experimental fields?

And in front of the gunther, too, how much could he say, how much did he dare to say? Graham could wreck their hopes with a word—or solve their problems as easily, if he chose. Graham had exposed the Commissioner's corruptness once; he wasn't always just a gunther; he was a part-time crusader. Possibly,

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he would understand Sun Lake's desperate necessity . . . possibly?

"Oh, by the way," the writer was saying. "I've been wondering what kind of a checkup you have on these people for security."

"Security?" For a minute the word didn't make sense; Tony realized suddenly that he hadn't even heard the word for a year; not, at least, with that sinister, special meaning.

"Don't you investigate the newcomers' backgrounds?"

"The Sun Lake Society—the recruiting office—checks on their employment records and their schooling to see that we don't get any romantic phonies masquerading as engineers and agronomists. That and plenty of health checks are all we need. The office wouldn't have time for more, anyway. It handles all the Earthside paperwork on our imports and exports, advertises, interviews, writes letters to the papers when that damn fool free-love story pops up again—" He gave Graham a look.

"All right," laughed the writer. "I'll make a mental note: Sun Lake doesn't believe in sex."

TONY was ruefully aware that a comeback was expected of him, but he substituted a feebly appreciative smile and leaned back, tiredly letting his eyelids drop again, in an effort to simulate sleep.

Through slitted eyes, he studied the new arrivals. They were crouched on the cabin floor, bundled into their parkas, talking only occasionally. Even Tad, at the far end of the cabin with the Jenkins' children, was low-voiced and restrained. Tony could see him pulling miraculous Martian treasures from his pockets for display, then pouncing on the few Earth items the new children had to show in return, cautiously pulled forth from supposedly empty pockets, and held for view in a half-cupped hand.

Near them, Bessie Jenkins, the mother of the two youngsters, sat half watching them, half talking to the mousier of the two single girls . . . Dantuono? Rose Dantuono, that was it. Anita Skelly, her vivid red hair concealed under the hood of her parka, was carrying on a conversation in monosyllables with Bob Prentiss; they seemed to be communicating a good deal more by hand pressure than by word of mouth. A shipboard romance, Tony wondered, or had they known each other back on Earth?

He shifted his gaze to the other side of the cabin, where the remaining three men sat: Arnold Jenkins, the lanky Bond, and young Zaretsky. They were lined up in a silent row, leaning against the bulkhead, evidencing none of the interested enthusiasm one might have expected. His own depression, the doctor realized, was affecting everyone.

What could he say to them? Here they were, newly escaped

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from Earth, from a madhouse with a time bomb in the basement. It had cost each one of them more than he could estimate, in courage, in money, in work, to make the escape—and what could he promise them now?

With luck, with the help from Graham, with all the breaks, the best they could look forward to was the everyday life of the Colony: working like dogs, living like ants, because it was the only way to pull free of the doomed world from which they had fled. At worst, and the worst was imminent—back on the same rocket, or the next, or the one after that, back with all the others, destitute. Back to Earth, with no money, no job, no place to live, and no hope at all.

"Tony."

It was Graham again.

"Yes?"

"It just occurred to me. Do you people charge for guest privileges? I'll be happy to shell out anything you think is reasonable. Sun Lake looks like a good story to me, and I want to stay on top of it."

"It hasn't come up before," Tony told him. "That means we'll have to vote on it. Personally, I'd vote for charging you."

"That's the idea! If I roast you in the book, you can say I was sore because you soaked me. If I give you a good report, you can prove it wasn't bought and paid for. Right."

"You're too shrewd for us Martian peasants, Graham. I was only thinking that we could use the money."

"Doc!" Bea yelled back into the cabin. "Radio!"

TONY got up and leaned over into the cockpit to accept the earphones Bea passed him.

"I can only spark a message back," she told him. "We didn't load the voice transmitter this trip."

He nodded. Through the phones a self-consciously important teen-age voice was saying: "Sun Lake to *Lazy Girl,* Dr. Hellman. Sun Lake to *Lazy Girl,* Dr. Hellman. Sun Lake—"

"*Lazy Girl* to Sun Lake, I read you, Hellman," he said and Bea's hand sputtered it out on the key.

"Sun Lake to *Lazy Girl,* I read you—uh—seventy-two at Pittco, can *Lazy Girl* sixteen Pittco, over."

"Dr. Tony to Jimmy Holloway," he dictated, "cut out the numbers game, Jimmy, and tell me what you want, over."

The teen-age voice was hurt. "Sun Lake to *Lazy Girl,* medical emergency at Pittco Camp, can *Lazy Girl* change course and land at Pittco, over."

"*Lazy Girl* to Sun Lake, wilco, Jimmy, but where's O'Reilly, over."

"Sun Lake to *Lazy Girl,* I don't know, Dr. Tony. They messaged us that O'Reilly wasn't due back from Marsport all day, over."

"*Lazy Girl* to Sun Lake, we'll take care of it, Jimmy, out." He

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passed the phone back to Bea. "Somebody's sick or hurt at Pittco. Drop me off there and I'll get back on one of their half-tracks."

"Right." Bea pulled out her map table.

The doctor went to the rear of the cabin where Tad had stowed the portable lab. He came back with a box of OxEn pills, and stood in the doorway between the cabin and the cockpit, facing the assembled group.

"These are the same pills you took on board the rocket this morning," he told them. "I don't think I have to warn you always to keep a few with you. Wherever you go, whatever you do, as long as you're on Mars, don't forget that it's literally as much as your life is worth if you don't take one of these *every twenty-four hours.*" They all knew that, of course; but there was no harm in impressing them with it again.

There was more he should say, but he didn't know what. He chose the next best alternative and sat down.

"What's cooking?" demanded Graham.

"Somebody sick or something at the Pittco outfit across the hills from our place. Their doctor's still in Marsport."

"Mind if I stick with you? I'd like to have a look at the place anyhow—when they're not ready for me."

Tony considered a moment, and decided he liked the idea. "Sure. Come along."

"I'd kind of like to see that girl who was for Pittco."

"You met her on the rocket?"

"I met her, all right, but she gave me a faster freeze than your girl pilot here. What is she anyhow—a lady engineer? All brains and no bounce?"

"Not exactly," Tony said. "I guess she figured she was on vacation. She's a new recruit for the company brothel. Those are the only women they've got at Pittco."

"Well, I'll be damned!" Graham was silent a moment, then added thoughtfully, "No *wonder* she wasn't interested!"

ii

LAZY GIRL touched down at Pittco near noon. The doctor and writer were met by Hackenberg, the mine boss, who drove out in a jeep as Bea zoomed her ship off over the hills to home.

"I think you're too late, Doc," he said.

"We'll see. Hack Hackenberg, Douglas Graham." They climbed in and the jeep rolled past the smokestacks of the refining plant, toward the huts of the settlement.

"Hell of a thing," grumbled Hackenberg. "Nobody's here. Madame Rose, Doc O'Reilly, Mr. Reynolds, all off at Marsport. God knows when they're coming back. Douglas Graham, did you say? You

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the reporter Mr. Reynolds was going to bring back? How'd you happen to come in with the doc?"

"I'm the reporter," Graham said, "but it's the first I knew about coming here with Reynolds. Did he tell you that?"

"Maybe he just said he hoped you would. I don't know. I got my hands full as it is. I got a contract to be mine boss; everybody takes off and Big Ginny gets her chest busted up, the girls go nuts, and I take the rap. What a life!"

"Was there a brawl?" asked the doctor.

"Nobody told me—they yanked me out of B plant. They found Big Ginny over by the hills. She was all messed up—you know what I mean, Doc. They thought she was raped. Rape Big Ginny, for God's sake! It ain't reasonable!"

"They *moved* her?"

"They took her back to Rose's. I tell them and tell them to leave 'em lay; just get 'em warm, give plasma, and wait for a doctor. It don't do any good. First thing they think of whenever anybody gets smashed up is he don't look neat enough, so they yank him around to lie nice and straight and they yank him up so they can get a pillow under his head and then they haul him like a sack of meal to a bed. I hope to hell I never have a cave-in here with these dummies. Back in Jo'burg it happened to me. A timber fell and broke my leg nice and clean. By the time all my friends were through taking care of me and getting me comfortable, it was a compound complicated fracture with bone splinters from my ankles on up."

The jeep stopped in front of a large house, solidly constructed of the expensive native glass brick. Unlike most of the jerry-built shacks that housed the temporary workers in the camp, it was one of the few buildings put up by the Company itself, and few expenses had been spared.

The door opened hesitantly, and a girl peered out, then opened it all the way. "Hello, Hack. Is this the doctor?"

She was dressed in neither the standard tunic of most Marswomen nor the gaudy clothes of her sisterhood on Earth; instead she wore tailored house-pajamas of Earthside synvelvet. She might have been any business woman or middle-class housewife answering her door back on Earth.

"Hello, Mary." Hackenberg turned to Tony. "Doc Hellman, this is Mary Simms. She's in charge when Rose is out. Mary, this is Douglas Graham, the famous gunther." He stressed the last word only slightly. "You've heard of him?"

"Oh, yes." She was distantly polite. "How do you do, Doctor? Won't you come in?"

"I'll have to take off now." Hackenberg shook Graham's hand vigorously. "Glad to have met you.

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I'll pick you up later, Doc." He waved and headed back for the jeep. Tony and Graham followed Mary Simms indoors and pulled off their parkas.

THE whole house *was* heated, the doctor noticed.

The girl led them through a large and rather formal parlor and into a smaller sitting room. She crossed the small room, and opened a door on the far side.

"In here, *Doctor,*" she said. Tony stepped into the small bedroom, and heard Graham right behind him.

"How about me?" demanded the writer.

The girl's voice was icy. "Professional courtesy, I suppose; we *are* in the same business, aren't we? By all means, come in."

The doctor turned his smile in the other direction. A huge blonde lay on the bed between fresh sheets. She was in coma, or . . .

"Out!" Tony said firmly, and closed the door on both of them.

He lifted the sheet and swore under his breath. Big Ginny had been washed and dressed in a rosebud-trimmed pink niron nightgown. Few people with internal injuries could survive such first-aid. He opened his bag and began the examination.

He stepped into the parlor. Mary rose from her chair to question him, but Tony forestalled her. "She's dead." He added in a puzzled voice, "Her chest was beaten in. Who found her?"

"Two of the men. Shall I get them?"

"Please. And—was there anything they found nearby?"

"Yes. I'll bring it." The girl went out.

"How about the rape?" Graham asked.

"She wasn't," Tony said.

He dropped into a chair and tried to think it out. The woman had been pregnant, and there were signs of a fresh try at abortion—the "rape." Was the father known? Had they tried to abort it? Had there been a scene and a fatal beating out there by the hills? How did you know who was the father of a child conceived in a place like this? And who else would have any reason for the violence?

Mary Simms came in and said, "I passed the word for the men." She moved coolly so that her body was between Graham and the doctor, and handed over something wrapped in a handkerchief. "They found this."

"Did you know she was six months pregnant?"

"Big Ginny?" she asked, amazed.

"Why not?"

"Why, I've seen her medical card, and she's been here two years. She was married a couple of times on Earth—" The girl was flustered.

"Well?"

"Well, it surprised me, that's all."

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He went into the small bedroom and unwrapped the object she had given him. It was a stained scrap of stout copper wire, about twenty-five centimeters long. That confirmed his diagnosis: attempted self-abortion, clumsy and dangerous because of the woman's bulk and probably hazy knowledge of anatomy. But the innumerable blows on her chest and back didn't make sense . . .

BACK in the parlor, two men in miners' leathers were waiting. The writer was questioning them idly about living conditions in the camp.

"I'm Dr. Hellman from Sun Lake," Tony said. "I want to ask you about finding Big Ginny."

"Hell, Doc," said one of the miners, "we just walked over that way and there she was. I said to Sam, 'It's Big Ginny! Jeez!' and he said, 'Some cheapskate musta hit her on the head,' and we tried to bring her around, but she wouldn't come to, so we made her comfortable and we went and told Mary and then we went back on shift."

"That's all there is to it," said the other miner. "But it wasn't one of our boys. You ask me, it was one of those Communist crackpots from over your place, all the time reading—it drives you nuts, did you know that? How is the old bag, Doc? Is she yelling for her money?"

"She's dead," the doctor said shortly. "Thanks for the information."

"You ask me," the miner repeated stoutly, "it's one of those Communists did it."

"Can you beat that?" the other one said softly. "What kind of guy would kill a dame like that?" They went out soberly.

"Those guys were a little too innocent," said Graham suddenly. "Didn't you think so?"

"I know what that's about," said Mary Simms. "They didn't mention why they happened to be out strolling on the desert. They're gow-heads. They were picking up some marcaine. They have a deal worked out with one of the people from Brenner's Hop Heaven. He steals the stuff from Brenner and leaves it under a rock for Sam and Oscar. They leave money."

"I knew something was sour about them," said Graham broodingly. "What do we do now, Tony?"

"I'm going to write a note to Dr. O'Reilly and see if I can get Hackenberg to drive us to Sun Lake." He sat down and took out his notebook and pen, found a blank page, and carefully recorded what he had seen, without adding any of his conclusions.

He signed his name, folded and handed the sheet to Mary Simms. "When you give the doctor this," he said, "please tell him I was sorry I couldn't stay to see him. We're having big times over at our place.

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Ten new colonists." He smiled. "Nine immigrants and a new baby."

"Boy or girl?" she asked, with sudden interest. "How is it—all right? Was it hard?"

"A boy. Condition fair. Normal delivery."

"That's nice," she said, with a musing smile. Then she was all business again. "Thank you for coming, Doctor. I can make some coffee for you while you're waiting for Mr. Hackenberg. We have real coffee, you know."

"I didn't know," he told her. "I'll take two cups."

iii

DR. TONY filled Hackenberg in on the jeep ride to Sun Lake. The mine boss profanely said nothing like that had ever happened before and he'd get the no-good swamper that did it and swing him from the gantry if he had to beat up every leatherhead in camp. He told some grisly stories about how he had administered rough justice to native coal miners in Johannesburg.

"'Course," he admitted, "you can't do that to Panamericans."

It's a good thing, thought Dr. Tony, that there wasn't any Martian animal life. An intelligent race capable of being sweated would really have got the works from Hackenberg, who could justify abominable cruelty to his brothers on the grounds that they'd been born in a different hemisphere of his own planet. God only knew what he would think justified by an extra eye or a set of tentacles.

Hackenberg took the wide swing through the gap in the hills and highballed the dozen miles to Sun Lake City. He came to a cowboy stop in front of the Lab and declined their hospitality.

"I have to get back before the big shots," he said. "Thanks, Doc. I'll see you around."

CHAPTER THIRTEEN

THE big main hall of the Lab was jammed with people, standing in earnest groups, strolling around, all talking at once. As the door slammed behind the doctor and the writer, the hubbub quieted, and seventy-odd pairs of eyes turned on the newcomers.

"Quite a delegation," Graham commented. "For me?"

"I don't know," Tony confessed. He searched the room, and saw Harve Stillman break away from a small group and head their way.

"Hi, Tony, did you bring a friend?"

He turned to find Mimi Jonathan at his elbow.

"Oh, Mimi, this is Douglas Graham. Did Bea tell you he was coming? Graham, Mimi Jonathan. Mi—Mrs. Jonathan is the Lab Administrator, in charge of making the wheels go round. And this is

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Harve Stillman. Harve used to be . . ."

". . . a newspaperman himself," Graham finished.

"Nope," Harve grinned. "A radioteletype repairman with the I.P."

"What a switch!" Graham smiled back and shook the other man's hand.

Tony turned from them to ask Mimi urgently: "How's it going? Did you finish up with the Lab search yet?"

"Afraid so. It's the same as the huts. Nothing turned up," she said harshly. "We'll have to check the shipping crates."

"Lord!" breathed Tony.

"Maybe it won't be so bad," Stillman ventured. "I've just given this crowd a briefing on handling hot stuff. Mimi seems to think we can clear it up in a day or two if we all pitch in."

"Provided," Mimi added, "we all work just a little harder than possible. I'm sorry you had to come to us at such a busy time, Mr. Graham. I hope you won't mind if we don't fuss over you too much. You're welcome to wander around and ask all the questions you want. Everyone will be glad to help you."

"It will be a welcome change," he assured her.

TONY waited very impatiently through a few more minutes of polite talk. As soon as Harve engaged the writer's attention again, the doctor turned back to Mimi. "What's the plan?" he asked.

"Five crews to get out about a kilometer into the desert, a half-kilometer apart. Everybody else brings them crates one at a time, they open and search, repack before the next one comes in. No contamination from crates standing open. Through all this you and Harve run back and forth checking the handling crews and the tote crews to see that they don't get danger doses and remove and treat them if they do. We figure four days to finish the job."

"Harve, do you think you're good enough to monitor the unpacking sites?" Tony asked. "Contamination from the native radioactives would be as bad as getting our own radiophosphorus into our radiomethyline blue."

"I didn't want to go out and try it on my own. Do you think I can swing it?"

"Sure. Go pick us five of the coolest spots on Mars."

The technician headed for the racked counters.

"Doc, can you let me in on that cryptic business?" demanded Graham.

"In—a minute," said Tony, his eyes wandering over the crowd. "Excuse me." He had spotted Anna and was starting her way when she turned, saw him and approached.

"We tried another feeding with the Kandro baby," she began wi

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out a preamble, "but he didn't take to it—choked it up again like yesterday."

Tony took out his pipe and bit abstractedly on the scarred stem. "No difference? No change at all?"

"Not that I could see. Tony, what's *wrong* with that baby?"

The doctor shook his head unhappily. "I don't know," he admitted.

There was something damnably wrong with the Kandro baby, something he couldn't quite figure. There was a clue somewhere in the vividly remembered picture of the gasping, red-faced infant, choking and spluttering on a mouthful of milk. Should he have tried water instead of normal feeding to get those scrambled reflexes into order?

"Doc—" said Graham.

"I'll be with you in a minute."

Anna went on serenely: "No trouble with Joan. I gave her her regular shot and changed the bandages when Tad told me you'd be late. She seemed fairly comfortable."

"Good. Miscellaneous complaints?"

"Kroll in engineering had a headache. And there's Mrs. Beyles. Her husband came and asked if there was anything I could do—they had a quarrel and he thought she went into a fit. It was a temper tantrum; I know you said not to give her anything, but John was so upset I gave her sedation to quiet her." She turned to Graham. "Sorry to have to drag out our hospital horrors. I'm sure you understand."

"Oh," said Tony, "I'm sorry. Douglas Graham, Anna Willendorf. Excuse me a minute, will you?" Mimi was tapping her foot, waiting for an opening. He told her: "I better get the afternoon safety done right now, and I'm damned if I'm going to do it with the whole Colony lurching around the Lab. Get 'em out of here so I can go to work, will you? Graham. I can answer questions while I go through the Lab looking for overlevel radiation. If you want to come along, you're welcome."

He led the writer out of the office into the dressing room, as Mimi began to break up the knots of non-Lab personnel who had shown up to thrash out the search plan and learn their own parts in it.

ii

TONY helped Graham into the suit of protective armor. He didn't usually bother with it himself on the afternoon inspection, when other people were all over the Lab, unprotected. In the morning it was different; the elaborate precautions of the outer-door locker were necessary when a hot spot had, possibly, had time to chain overnight. But while work was actually going on, nothing very hot could

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develop without being noticed. The late check was primarily for the purpose of insuring the absence of the hot spots that could develop overnight.

The doctor started his meandering course through the Lab, with Graham in tow.

"I'm making the second of our twice-a-day safety checks for excess radioactivity. It happens that we've got to unpack all our material scheduled for export, examine it and repack it in a hurry if we want to get it aboard the outgoing rocket in time to get credit to pay our bills."

"Just routine, I suppose?" asked Graham blandly.

"I think you gathered that it certainly isn't. The fact is, your friend, Commissioner Bell, has accused us of harboring a thief and his loot—a hundred kilos of marcaine. We've searched everybody and everything so far except the export crates; now we've got to search them."

"Why not tell the old windbag to go blow?"

"If we don't turn up the marcaine, he can seal us up for six months to conduct an inch-by-inch search."

"What's so dreadful about that?" Graham asked.

"We're geared to two ships in six months now instead of one ship a year. If we missed two shipments, both incoming and outgoing, we'd be ruined."

GRAHAM grunted thoughtfully, and Tony waited—and waited—the grunt was all. He'd been half-hoping the writer would volunteer to help—perhaps by picking up his anti-Bell crusade or by promising to see his powerful friends, or by exposing the sorry mess to the public. But Graham, apparently forgetting the Bell business entirely, pitched the doctor a ferocious series of questions that threatened to stretch out the inspection endlessly:

"What's in this box? Why isn't this conveyor shielded? Where's the stock room? What do you do here? Is it technical or trade school stuff? Where did this soil come from? What did you pay for it? Tile on this floor, concrete on that—why? Who's in charge here? How many hours does he work? That many? Why? How many hours does *hé* work?"

As Tony paraded solemnly back and forth with the counter, checking off items on his report, he pressed a little on the writer.

"This crate here," he said, "is a typical sale. Radiophosphorus for cancer research. It goes to the Leukemia Foundation in San Francisco. It's a traceless pure—better than nine-nines. We're in business because we can supply that kind of thing. On Earth they'd have to first make the traceless-pure phosphorus and then expose it to a reactor or a particle accelerator, and the extra step there usually means it gets con-

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taminated and has to be refined again. Here we just produce phosphorus by the standard methods and it *is* radioactive because the whole planet's got it. Not enough to present a health problem any more than cosmic rays on Earth do, but damned convenient for Sun Lake."

"Some crate," commented the writer.

"Lead, air gaps, built-in counter with a loud alarm. It's the law. Normally, we have five per cent of our manpower working in the shipping department. Now we have to unpack and recrate all this stuff in less than four days."

"You people should have a lobby," suggested Graham. "If something like that was handicapping Pittco, they'd get rid of it quick. Are we just about through?"

"Just about," said Tony flatly. So much for that, he thought; at least he'd given the writer an eyeful of the safety precautions they observed, and made him sweat a little under the heavy suit at the same time.

In the cleanup room they stripped and showered, with Graham chortling suddenly: "O'Mally was a prophet! My first city editor—he said when I got rich I'd install hot and cold running Scotch in my bathroom!"

"Sorry we only have cold, and don't drink this stuff unless you want to go blind. It's methyl."

"Can't be worse than the stuff I used to guzzle in Philly," Graham said blandly, but he stepped out quickly enough and followed the doctor's advice about a lanolin rubdown afterward.

"Dinner time now," said Tony, buttoning on his tunic. "Mess hall's here in the Lab. Only building big enough."

"Synthetics?" asked Graham.

"No, that's not the Sun Lake idea. We want to get on an agricultural cycle as fast as we can. Sun Lake has to be able to live on vegetables that grow naturally, without any fertilization except our own waste products. Naturally we're strong on beans, kudzu, yams, goobers—any of the nitrogen-fixing plants that contain some natural protein. You'll see."

GRAHAM saw, he tasted, he expectorated. Into the shocked silence of the half-dozen at the table, he muttered an embarrassed apology and manfully choked down almost half of his vegetable plate—Mars beans, barley, stewed greens and another kind of stewed greens.

To Tony he muttered when conversation had sprung up again: "But why do they taste like a hospital smells? Do you have to disinfect them or something?"

Joe Gracey overheard it from the other side of the table. "That's my department," he said. "No, it isn't disinfectant. What you and most other people don't realize is that we with our Lab are pikers com-

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pared with the lowliest cabbage in synthesizing chemicals. We taste the chemicals in our Earth plants and we accept them as the way they ought to taste. These are unfamiliar because these are Mars plants modified so that their chemicals aren't poison to Earth animals, or Earth plants modified so that Mars soil isn't poison to them. We're still breeding on this barley, which is generating too much iodoform for me to be really happy. If I can knock one carbon out of the ring—but you don't care about that. Just be glad we didn't try out the latest generation of our cauliflower on you instead of our test mice. The cauliflower, I'm sorry to say, generates prussic acid."

"Stick with those mice!" said Graham with a greenish smile.

"Only guaranteed-Earth animals on Mars, including you," said Madge Cassidy, beside Graham. He watched her wonderingly as she finished her barley with apparent enjoyment.

"How was that again?"

"My mice. The only animals on Mars guaranteed non-mutated. We have them behind tons of concrete and lead with remote feeding. It'd be no joke if some of the natural Mars radioactivity or some of the stuff flying around the Lab mutated them so they'd gobble Mars food that was still poison to people."

"You mean I might go back to Earth and have a two-headed baby?"

"It's possible," said Madge, getting to work on variety number one of stewed greens. "Odds are somewhat higher than it happening from cosmic rays or industrial radioactivity on Earth. But mouse generations go by so fast that with them it's a risk we can't take. Some of the pork-and-beaners died very unpleasant deaths when they tried eating Mars plants as a last resort. It *was* the last resort, all right."

"But isn't *anything* on Mars good to eat?"

"A couple of items," Gracey told him. "Stuff that would probably be poisonous to any native animal life, if there was any. You find the same kind of thing on Earth—plants that don't seem to be good for anything in their native environment. My theory is that the ancestors of poison ivy and other such things aren't really Earth plants at all, but came to Earth, maybe as spores aboard meteorites. We need a broader explanation of the development of life than the current theories offer. We've grown a giant barley here, for instance, out of transplanted Earth stock, but it wouldn't be viable there. The gene was lethal on Earth. Here—"

HE RATTLED on, to the accompaniment of Graham's nods of agreement, until Harve Stillman broke in: "Hey, there was a rumor through the radio relay today. You know about it, Mr. Graham?"

"Doug," the writer corrected.

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"Okay," Harve smiled. "About marcaine—no, not about us," he added hastily. "About marcaine being forbidden in Tartary. The Cham pronounced a rescript or whatever it is, and according to the guys in Marsport that means the price goes up, and Brenner's business is doubled. Do you know anything about it, Doug?"

The newsman looked surprised. "It was all over the ship," he told them. "Everybody was talking about it. How come you don't get it till now? The radio op on board told me he spilled it in his first message to PAC."

"It's true then?" Gracey asked sharply.

"I wouldn't know. I'm only a reporter myself." He looked across to Tony. "Don't tell me Marsport wasn't buzzing with it. Brenner, knew, didn't he?"

"No," the doctor said slowly. "I didn't hear anything about it there . . ." But he had heard of a rumor; who was it? Chabrier! Of course, that was Chabrier's rumor: marcaine prices going up, production will double, Brenner needs a new plant, needs a doctor, too . . .

Tony stood up abruptly. "Excuse me. Gracey, are you finished? Want to come along?"

The agronomist rose quickly, and the two left together. On the way to collect Nick and go over to the Jonathans', Tony explained the situation rapidly to Gracey.

"I wanted to get the Council together tonight anyhow," he finished up, "to tell you about my idiotic brawl with Brenner. I don't know what kind of jam *that's* going to land us in. But this business ties in with what Chabrier told me. Rocket to Bell and Bell to Brenner, and the rest of us can get the news whenever the Commissioner gets around to it!"

"It makes a nasty picture," the agronomist agreed soberly. "Now what? Where do we go from here?"

"Damned if I know. Maybe one of the others can figure it." He knocked sharply on Nick's door.

CHAPTER FOURTEEN

"IT DOESN'T matter," Mimi said firmly. "We still have to go through with the search."

"That's how I see it, too," Tony admitted. "We can't bring any accusations until we know our own slate is clean."

"If we could only get hold of the Bloodhound . . ."

"Bell refused."

"And that means no matter how carefully we search, he can still come in afterward and claim it wasn't done properly."

"Could we rent one or buy it?" Gracey wanted to know.

"Government property only," Mimi told him. "O'Donnell checked on that the other day."

"Okay, so we have to do it without the Bloodhound." Nick

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jumped up and paced the length of the room restlessly. "I bet I could build one if we only had a little time . . . Well, we have to go ahead, that's all. Where does Graham come in?"

TONY realized they were waiting for an answer from him. "I don't know. He has no use for Bell, but he doesn't exactly rise to the bait when I throw it at him either. I think we better go slow and feel him out. He didn't seem to go for the blunt approach when Chabrier and the others tried it."

"Slow?" Nick stormed. "Man, we've got six days! Go *slow?*"

"As fast as we can," Gracey put in. "We still have to get the search finished. I think we have to do that before we ask Graham anything. He has to have some facts to work with."

"Right," Mimi agreed. "Now let's get our plans organized. If we start at dawn, maybe we can do the whole unpacking operation tomorrow. . . . *then* we can hit Graham. Means we'll have to leave crates open and repack them later, but I don't see any alternative now. How long is Graham staying, Tony?"

"He said maybe three days."

"Okay, then that's how we've got to do it. Maybe by tomorrow night we'll know better how to get at the guy."

They spent a busy ten minutes outlining the plan of operations, and then the three men went out, leaving the details for Mimi to settle.

Tony walked down the settlement street slowly, trying to get his thoughts in order. It had been a long day—three-fifteen in the morning when Tad woke him, and now there was still work to do.

Stopping in at the hospital to collect his bag, he found Graham kibitzing idly with Harve in his living room.

"Just waiting for you, Doc." Stillman stood up. "I have to get over to the radio shack. Tad's on the p.m. shift this week, but he fell asleep before supper, so I've got to take over tonight."

Tony surveyed his guest uncomfortably. "Anything you'd like?" he asked. "I have to go out and see a couple of patients. Won't be too long."

"Could I go along?" Graham asked. "I'd like to, if it's all right with you."

"Sure. I want you to see the baby I was talking about anyhow. My other patient is pretty sick; you may have to wait while I look in on her."

They stopped at the Radcliff's first, but Joan was asleep and she usually got so little rest that Tony decided not to disturb her. Anna had said she'd had a fairly good day. He'd see her tomorrow.

"Where is this infant?" Graham asked as they walked down the Colony street.

"Here. This is the Kandros'

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place. Hello, Polly," Tony said as the door opened, even before he knocked. "I brought Mr. Graham along to visit. I hope you don't mind."

"I . . . no, of course not. How do you do? Come in, won't you?" Her manner was absurdly formal, and her appearance was alarming. Tony wondered when she had last slept. Her eyes were over alert, her lips too tight, her neck and shoulders stiff with tension.

"How's Sunny?" He walked into the new room where the crib stood, and the others followed. He wished now that he hadn't brought Graham along.

"The same," Polly told him. "I just tried. You see?"

THE baby in its basket was sputtering feebly, its face flushed bright red. *We're going to lose that youngster,* thought the doctor grimly, *unless I start intravenous feeding, and soon.*

"Tell me something, please, Doctor," she burst out, ignoring the reporter's presence. "Could it be my fault? I'm anxious—I know that. Could that be why Sunny doesn't eat right?"

Tony considered. "Yes, to a degree, but it couldn't account for *all* the trouble. Are you really so tense? What's it all about?"

"You know how it was with us," she said evasively. "We tried so many times on Earth. And then here we thought at first it'd be like all the other times, but, Tony, do you think—is Mars dangerous?"

He saw she'd changed her mind in mid-confession and substituted the inane question for whatever she had started to ask. He intended to get to the bottom of it.

Over the woman's shoulder, he looked meaningfully at Graham. The reporter grimaced, shrugged, and obligingly drifted back to the living room.

Tony lowered his voice and told the woman: "Of course Mars is dangerous. It's dangerous now; it was dangerous before you had Sunny. I'm a little surprised at you, Polly. Some women think that having a baby ought to change the world into a pink spun-candy heaven. It doesn't. You've had Sunny; he's a small animal and you love him and he needs your care, but Mars is still what it always was. The terrain's rugged and some of the people aren't what they ought to be. But . . ."

"Tell me about the murder," she said flatly.

"Oh, is *that* what you're jumpy about? I saw worse every night I rode the meat wag—rode the ambulance at Massachusetts General. What's that got to do with Sunny?"

"I don't know. I'm afraid. Tell me about it, Doctor, please."

He wondered what vague notion of terror she had got stuck in her head—and wondered whether it would come out.

"You're the doctor," he said,

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shrugging. "The girl who got killed was named Big Ginny, as you may have heard. If you'd been on the wagon with me in Boston, you'd know there's nothing unusual about it. Women like that often get beaten up, sometimes beaten to death by their customers. The customers are usually drunk, sometimes full of dope; they get the idea that they're being cheated and they slug the girl. Another call for the wagon."

"I heard," she said, "that she was beaten to death with a lot of light blows. No man would do that. And I heard that Nick Cantrella saw footprints out by the caves—naked footprints. He thought they were children's."

"Whose do you think they were?" he asked, though he had a sickly feeling that he knew what she'd say.

POLLY moaned, "It was brownies! I told you I saw one and you didn't believe me! Now they've killed this woman and they're leaving footprints around and you still don't believe me! You think I'm crazy! You all think I'm crazy! They want my baby and you won't listen to me!"

Tony thought he knew what was going on in her head and he didn't like it. She had seen the attention of the Colony shift from her baby to the marcaine search, and was determined to bring it back, even if it had to be by a ridiculous ruse. She'd heard all the foolish stories about the mythical brownies; she'd had a vivid anxiety dream—which, he reminded himself, she had finally admitted was only a dream—and now she was collecting "evidence" to build herself up as the interesting victim of a malignant persecution.

"We've been over all this before," he told her wearily. "You agreed that you didn't really see anything. And you agreed that there couldn't be any brownies because no animal life has ever been found on Mars—no brownies, and nothing brownies could evolve from. Now . . ."

"Doctor," she broke in, "I've got to show you something." She reached into the baby's basket and drew out something that glinted darkly in her hand.

"Good Lord, what are you doing with a gun?" the doctor demanded.

There was no more conflict on her face or hesitancy in her voice. "You can say I'm crazy, Tony, but I'm afraid. I think there could be such things as brownies. And I'm going to be ready for them if they come." She looked at the little weapon tensely and then put it back under the pad in the crib.

Tony promptly drew it out. "Now listen, Polly, if you want to believe in brownies or ghosts or Santa Claus, that's your business. But you certainly should know better than to leave the gun near him. I'm going to give you a sedative, Polly, and maybe after a good—"

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"No," she said. "No sedative. I'll be all right. But can I keep the gun?"

She wiped her eyes and, with an effort, laid her twitching hands quietly in her lap.

"If you know how to use it and keep the safety on and put it some place besides under Sunny's mattress, I don't see why not. But all the brownies you'll ever shoot with it you could stick in your eye and never notice."

"Like the old lady, maybe I don't believe in ghosts but I'm terribly afraid of them?" She tried to laugh and Tony managed a smile with her.

"Nothing wrong with blowing your top once in a while. Nothing at all. Women ought to bawl oftener."

She grinned weakly and said:

"Maybe Sunny's going to eat better now."

"I hope so. I'll see you tomorrow, Polly."

ii

AS THEY walked down the street in a strained, embarrassed silence, Graham looked as if he wanted to ask something. He finally did: "By the way, Tony, do you know where I'm supposed to sleep? Or where I'd find my bag? It was on the plane."

"Might as well stay with me. And your baggage ought to be at the Campbells. Tad Campbell was that young sprout who deflated my fight with Brenner."

The baggage, a sizable B-4 bag on which Graham must have paid a ruinous overweight charge, was at the Campbells. After picking it up, the writer followed the doctor to his hospital-hut.

Tony snapped a heat beam on the two plastic chairs—standard furnishings of a Sun Lake living room—and took off his sandboots with a grunt. Graham rooted through his baggage, picked up Chabrier's gaudy package and hefted it thoughtfully, then shook his head and dove in again. He came up grinning, with another bottle.

"How about it, Doc?" he asked. "This is Earthside."

"It's been a long time," Tony sighed. "I'll get a couple of glasses."

The stuff went down like silken fire. It had been a very long time.

"What's about brownies?" the writer asked suddenly. "I couldn't help hearing part of that when I went out of the room."

Tony shook his head. "*Brownies!* As if we didn't have enough trouble here, without inventing Martian monsters . . ."

"Well, what *about* them? All I've ever heard is that deep purple scene in Granata's interplanetary show. It's silly stuff, but nobody's handled it yet at all except Granata. Maybe I could use something; it's a beautiful story if there's anything

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at all to back it up. Does anybody claim a connection between fairy book brownies and the Martian variety?"

"Two ways. First of all, Mars brownies are just as much a fairy story as the Earthside kind. Second, somebody once suggested that the ones in the story books were the space traveling ancestors of the present-day hallucinations."

"Could be," the gunther reflected. "Could be . . ."

"Could be a lot of rot," Tony said without heat. "Space travel requires at an absolute minimum the presence of animal life—or at least mobile, intelligent life. Show me so much as one perambulating vegetable on Mars, let alone a native animal life-form. Then it's likely I'll think about brownies some more."

"How about a declining race?" Graham speculated. "Suppose they *were* space travelers, on a high level of civilization—they might have killed off all lesser life-forms. You see it happening some on Earth, and back there it's just a matter of living-space. We don't have the problem the Martians had to face, of dwindling water and oxygen supplies. Probably got them in the end, and destroyed their civilization . . . except," he added, "for the ones who got to Earth. I understand from authoritative sources that the last expedition to Earth was led by a guy named Oberon." Graham chuckled and drank, then asked seriously: "Has anybody ever *seen* one, except Granata?"

"Hundreds of people," Tony said drily. "Ask any one of the old prospectors who come into town hauling dirt. They've all seen 'em, lived with 'em; some even claim to have been at baby-feasts. You'll get all the stories you want out of any of the old geezers."

"What are brownies supposed to look like?" the writer insisted.

TONY sighed and surrendered, recognizing the same intense manner Graham had displayed in the Lab. The man was a reporter, after all. It was his business to ask questions. Tony gave him what he wanted, with additions, explanations, and embellishments.

Brownies: an intelligent life-form, either animal or mobile vegetable. About a meter and a half in height; big ears; skinny arms. Supposed to be the naked remnants of a once-proud Martian civilization. (Except that there were no other remnants to support the theory.) In the habit of kidnaping human children (except that there was no specific authenticated case of a baby's disappearance) and eating them (except that that seemed too pat and inevitable an idea-association with the kidnaping—the sort of additional embellishment that no good liar could resist).

"It's an old prospectors' yarn," Tony wound up. "The homesteaders picked it up to frighten kids

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into sticking close to home. There are hundreds of people on Mars today who'll tell you they've seen brownies. But not only is there no native animal life of any kind on Mars today—so far as we can tell, there *never* has been. No ruins, no old cities, no signs of civilization, and not so much as one single dessicated dried-out scrap of anything resembling an animal fossil."

"That's strictly negative evidence," Graham pointed out. He emptied his glass, and poured another drink for both of them. "Cigaret?"

Tony shook his head. "I gave up smoking long ago. We all quit sooner or later. Too much trouble to keep tobacco burning." He reached out to pick up his empty pipe from the table beside him, and he clenched the stem comfortably between his teeth.

Graham repeated: "Strictly negative evidence. But on the other side you have footprints, for instance, and eyewitness stories."

"If you're talking about the cataract-covered eyes of old Marsmen," Tony retorted, "don't call it evidence."

"It wouldn't be," Graham agreed, "except that there are so many of them. I'm beginning to think there's a story in it after all."

"You mean you believe it?" the doctor demanded.

"Do I *look* crazy? I said it was a story."

"So you came 150 million kilometers on a rocket, and then four more hours across Mars in a beat-up old rattletrap of a plane," the doctor said bitterly. "You eat food that tastes like hospital disinfectant, and live in a mud hut, all so you can go back home and write a nice piece of fiction about brownies—a piece you could have dashed off without ever leaving Earth!"

"Not exactly," the gunther said mildly. "I was only thinking of using the brownies for one chapter. Local color, tales and legends—that kind of thing."

"You could get plenty of stories back on Earth," Tony went on bitterly. "Stories worth writing. How about Paul Rosen's story? There's a *real* one for you."

"Rosen?" Graham leaned forward, interested again. "Seems to me I've heard the name before. Who was he?"

"Not was. Is. He's still alive; a cripple nobody knows."

"TELL me about Rosen." The writer filled their glasses again.

"I'll tell you about Mars; it's the same story. You came to write a book about Mars, didn't you? Well, Mars—this Mars, without oxygen masks—is Rosen's work. Rosen's lungs. And you never heard of him . . . Rosen was the medical doctor aboard the relief ship, the one that found what was left of the first colony. He had a notion about the oxygen differential, was con-

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vinced that it wasn't responsible for the failure. He was wrong, of course, but he was right, too. To prove his point he took off his mask and found he didn't need it.

"His assistant tried it, and nearly died of anoxemia. That proved some people could take Mars straight and others couldn't. When the ship got back Rosen went to the biochem boys with his lungs. They told him a few c.c. wouldn't be enough to work with, so he volunteered for an operation. Most of his lung tissue was removed. He was crippled for life, but they tracked down the enzyme that made the difference, and worked out a test."

"That I remember," said Graham, continuing to fill the glasses almost rhythmically. "Half the guys I met in Asia claimed they enlisted because they weren't Marsworthy and life wasn't worth living if they couldn't go to Mars."

"THAT was the beginning of it," Tony said. "The ones who passed the test began to come over. Thousand dollars a day prospecting, and always the chance of finding bonanzas. At first they were pork-and-beaners, but the Mars vegetation they brought back took us one step closer to fitting into the Martian ecology. The biochem boys came up with a one-shot hormone treatment to stimulate secretion of an enzyme from the lining of the pylorus. It's present in most people without the shot, but not enough to break down the Martian equivalent of carbohydrates into simple sugars which the human body can handle. You asked me before what all the shots you got on board the rocket ship were for. That's one of them. It means you can handle the Mars plants which don't contain compounds poisonous to Earth animals.

"The other shots you got were to protect you against all the rest of the things that killed off the first pork-and-beaners—fungi, ultra-violet damage to the eyes, dehydration, viruses. For every shot you got, half a dozen of the first explorers and prospectors were killed or crippled to find the cause and cure.

"Five years ago came the payoff. The biochem boys got what they'd been looking for ever since they first sliced up Rosen's trick lungs. They synthesized the enzyme, your little pink OxEn pill, and that did it. That's when the Sun Lake Society was founded; and the new rocket fuel two years ago made Sun Lake a reality. With OxEn and four trips a year, we can make out until we find a way to get along without Earth.

"Sun Lake is Mars, Graham. Sun Lake's all's gonna be left when you crazy bastards back on Earth blow yourselves up. The other colonists here aren't Mars; they're part of Earth. When Earth goes, they go. Sun Lake's all's gonna be left . . ."

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"Coupla catches," said Graham, trying to make a glass stay put so he could fill it. "Commish Bell and his eviction notice. And you still need OxEn. Can you make that inna Lab?"

"Not yet," Tony brooded. He had forgotten the lovely optimism that could be poured out of a bottle. "Guess I had 'nough to drink. I have a hell of a day ahead of me."

CHAPTER FIFTEEN

A HELL of a day it was. It started, for one thing, with a hangover. Tony heaved himself out of bed, glad to find Graham still asleep. He didn't want any cheerful conversation just yet. He prescribed, dispensed, and self-administered some aspirin, used an extra cup of water for a second cup of "coffee," finally decided he was strong enough to face the reek of methyl alcohol, and got washed.

Mimi Jonathan was in charge at the Lab when he got there. Law or no law, he raced through the A.M. Lab check to get ahead on the awful job of monitoring the unpacking operation. He rode out on a bike to the five spots Stillman had selected for the inspection crews and found them reasonably low in radioactivity.

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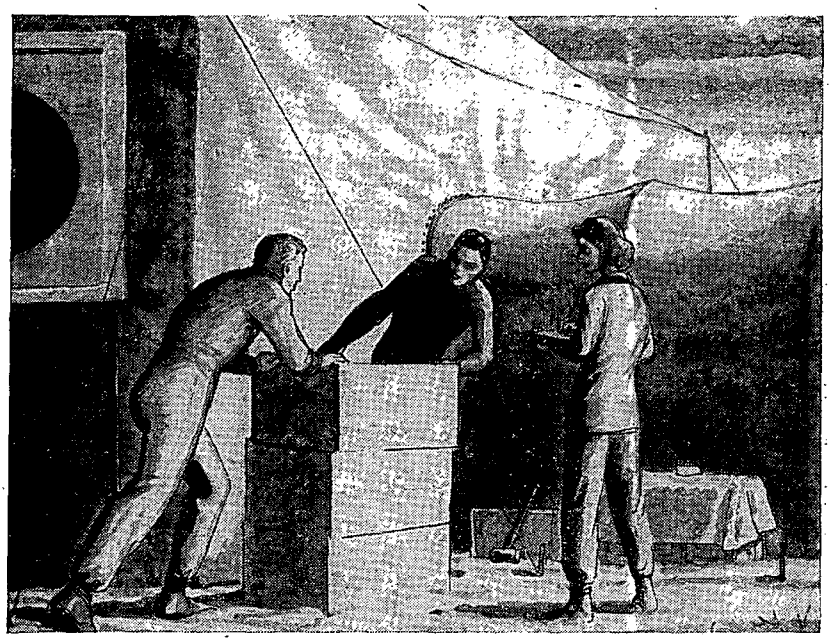

Sheets of plastic had been laid down for flooring and tent walls were going up, with little tunnels through which the crates could be passed without the handlers bringing in all the dust of Mars on their feet. Blowers were rigged to change the air between each inspection, and radiologically clean overalls would be passed in at the same time.

A little after dawn, the careful frenzy was in full swing. A crew in the shipping room eased out crates and passed them to wrappers who covered them with plastic sheeting and heat-sealed them. Aboard skids, the crates were manhandled up the slight slope from the "canal" bed to the tents in the desert, unwrapped, passed in, opened, searched, checked for chemical and radiological contamination, sealed and passed out again. Back at the Lab, they would be wrapped in lead sheets pending recrating and stored separately in every workroom that could be spared.

Mimi was everywhere, ordering a speedup on the heat-sealing, or a slowdown on the bucket-brigade manhandling, routing crates to the station that would soonest be free, demanding more plastic sheeting, drafting a woman to wash more coveralls when a stand of them toppled over. The few Lab proces-

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ses that couldn't be left alone were tended under the direction of Sam Flexner, by people from agro and administration, and by specialized workers like Anna Willendorf.

Tony and Harve Stillman moved constantly up and down the line, back to the Lab and out to the desert, checking persons, places and materials. Before noon Tony had the bitter job of telling Mimi: "We've got to abandon the Number Two tent. It's warming up. Radioactivity's low on the site, but it's from something that chains with the plastic flooring, I don't know what. Another hour and radiation from the flooring will contaminate the crates."

The woman set her jaw and picked another crew from the line to set up a tent on another monitored site.

Somebody slipped in the Number Three tent, and Harve Stillman found some of the Leukemia Foundation's shipment of radiophosphorus had got from the inside of the crate to the outside—enough to warrant refusal by the rocket supercargo in the interests of the safety of the ship.

But never a trace of marcaine did the search crews find.

LUNCH was at noon, carried about by Colony children. Gulping cool "coffee," Tony told Harve Stillman: "You'll have to take it alone for a while. I haven't visited my patients yet. I missed Joan Radcliff altogether yesterday."

"Hell, I don't know whether I'm coming or going," grunted Stillman, then added, "I guess I can manage."

"Send for me if there's anything you really can't handle." Tony started back toward the street of huts before a new emergency could delay him.

He stopped at his own house to pick up his medical bag, and found Graham awake, at work in front of an old-fashioned portable typewriter. Another surprise from the gunther; Tony had assumed the man worked with a dictatyper. Even in the Colony they had those.

Graham looked up pleasantly and nodded. "Somebody waiting for you in the other room, Tony." He motioned with his head toward the door that led to the hospital. "You going out again?"

The doctor nodded. "I don't know when I'll get back. You can walk around and ask questions wherever you find anybody. You understand the situation here—we can't let up on this marcaine business even for the press."

"Sure." The gunther nodded, unperturbed.

"I'll get around in time to pick you up for supper anyhow," Tony promised. "Did you get any lunch?"

"I managed." Graham grinned and pointed to an open can still half full of meat, and a box of

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hard crackers. "Look," said the writer, "Unless you've lost your Earthside tastes completely, why don't you have supper on me tonight? There's lots more where lunch came from."

"Thanks. I might take you up on that."

Tony went into the hospital, where Edgar Kroll was waiting for him.

"Sorry to bother you today, Doc," Kroll apologized. "I came over on the chance you'd be around right about now. Another one of those damned headaches; I couldn't get any work done at all this morning. Guess I'm just getting old."

"Old!" Tony snorted. "Man, even in Sun Lake, you're not old at thirty-five! Not just because you need bifocals. You've stalled around long enough now . . ." And heaven only knew what boudoir tauntings from young Jeanne Kroll lay behind that, Tony thought, as he reached into the dispensary cabinet. "Here's some aspirin for now. If you come around tomorrow, I think I'll have time to refract you; I just can't manage it today. Take the afternoon off if the headache doesn't go away."

HE GOT his black bag, and walked down the street with Edgar, as far as the Kandros' place. At the door, he bumped into Jim, just leaving for the Lab, after lunch.

"Glad I saw you, Doc." The new father stood hesitantly in the doorway, waiting till Kroll was out of earshot, then burst out: "Listen, Tony, I didn't want to say anything in front of Polly, but . . . are you sure it's going to be all right? Sunny still isn't eating. Maybe it's cancer or something! I heard of something like that with one of our neighbor's kids back in Toledo—"

Just—just exactly the sort of thing that made Tony almost blind with rage. He liked the man; Jim Kandro was his brother, his comrade in the Colony, but—! With his pulse hammering, he made it clear to Jim in a few icy sentences that he had studied long, sacrificed much and worked hard to learn what he could about medicine, and that when he wanted a snap diagnosis from a layman he would ask for one. Jim and Polly could yank him out of bed at three in the morning, they could make him minister to their natural anxieties, but they could *not* make him take such an insult.

He stalked into the house, ignoring Jim's protests and apologies both, and professional habit took over him as he greeted Polly and examined the baby.

"About time for a feeding, isn't it?" he asked. "Is it going any better? Since last night, I mean? Want to try him now while I observe?"

"It's a little better, I guess." Polly smiled doubtfully and picked up the baby. She moved the plastic

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cup of the oxygen mask up a little over the small nose, and put Sunny to her breast.

To Tony, it was plain that the infant was frantic with hunger. *Then why didn't it nurse properly?* Instead of closing over the nipple, Sunny's mouth pushed at it one-sidedly, first to the right, then to the left, any way but the proper way. For seconds at a time the baby did suck, then would release the nipple, choking.

"He's doing a little better," said Polly. "He's doing *much* better!"

"That's fine!" Tony agreed feebly. "I'll be on my way, then. Be sure to call me if there's anything."

HE WALKED down the Colony street wishing a doctor could afford the luxury of shaking his head in bewilderment. Maybe it was all straightening out. But *what* could account for the infant's fantastic behavior? There's nothing so determined as a baby wanting to feed—but *something* was getting in the way of Sunny's instinct.

He hoped Polly realized that Sunny would feed sooner or later, that the choking reflex which frustrated the sucking reflex would disappear before long. He hoped she would realize it; he hoped desperately that it would happen.

Joan Radcliff was next and this time he found her awake. She was no better and no worse; the enigmatic course of her nameless disease had leveled off. All he could do was talk a while, go through the pulse-taking and temperature-reading mumbo-jumbo, change the dressings on her sores, talk some more, and then go out.

Now Dorothy, the sinus case, and he was done with his more serious cases for today.

Tanya Beyles had a green sick card on her door, but he decided to ignore it. He was already past the house when she called his name, and he turned to find her beckoning from the opened door.

She had dressed up to beat the band—an absurdly tight tunic to show off her passable thirty-plus figure, carefully done hair and the first lipstick he remembered seeing around in months.

"I don't have much time, today, Mrs. Beyles," he said carefully. "Could it wait till tomorrow?"

"Oh, please, Doctor," she begged, and launched into a typical hypochondriac resumé of symptoms, complete with medical terms inaccurately used. What it boiled down to was that a thorough examination was in order though there was nothing *nasty* wrong with her.

"Very well," he said. "If you'll come over to the hospital—next week, perhaps—when I have more time." With a chaperone, he added silently.

"Wouldn't it be just as easy here, and more private?" she ventured shyly, indicating the bedroom, where a heat lamp was already focused on the made bed.

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"Dear God," he muttered, and found the professional restraint that had taken over while he was with Polly Kandro had now quite abandoned him. "Mrs. Beyles," he said, plainly and nastily, "you may not realize it, but we do have a sense of humor here, even if we don't share your ideas of fun. We've been able to laugh off your malicious gossiping and the lousy job you do in Agronomy; you do get some work done in Agro, and you don't eat too much to keep your shape. Up to now, we've been able to laugh everything off and hope you'd straighten out. But I warn you, if you start being seductive around Sun Lake—even if you start with me—you'll get shipped out so fast you won't . . ."

"Is that so?" she screamed. "Well, maybe you'd like to know that I can get all the love and respect I want around here and where you got the nasty idea that I'm at all interested in you I can't imagine. I've heard of doctors like you before and if you think you're going to get away with it you're very much mistaken. And don't think I don't know all about you and that Willendorf woman. I know things people would love to hear . . ."

He walked off before she could say any more. God only knew what they'd do with her—deport her, he supposed, and her sad sack of a husband would have to go, too, and it would all be very messy and bad-tempered. Maybe Bell and Graham and all the others were right, regarding Sun Lakers as anywhere from mildly insane to fanatically obsessed.

Maybe anything at all, but he still had to go to see Dorothy and her sinuses. The doctor's facial muscles fell into their accustomed neutrality as he walked into the girl's bedroom and his mind automatically picked up the threads of the bacitracin story where he had left off two days before.

ii

HALF an hour later, he was back at the unpacking and search operation where he took over alone while Stillman, groggy with the strain, the responsibility and the plain hard work, took a short break. The two of them divided the job then, moving steadily up and down the lines, checking, rechecking endlessly until, as darkness closed down, they were suddenly aware that there were no more crates.

Mimi Jonathan bitterly enumerated the results of the search: "About 1,500 man-hours shot to hell, three crates contaminated beyond salvage, nine salvageable for umpty-hundred more man-hours—and no marcaine. Well, nobody can say now that we didn't try." She turned to Tony. "Your move," she said.

"Graham?" The doctor stood up. "All I can do is try to get him on our side. He's friendly anyhow; he

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asked me to have supper with him out of his private stock of genuine synthetic Earthside protein."

"You don't sound too hopeful," Gracey ventured.

"I'm not. Did I tell you what his favorite story is so far? *Brownies!*"

"You mean he's passing up a yarn like the killing at Pittco, and he wants to write about *Brownies?*" Nick asked incredulously.

"You think he's going to step on Pittco's toes?" Tony retorted. "Not that smart boy! Okay, I might as well get back and make my try." He started across the darkening desert, and Nick fell into step beside him. "Why don't you come along?" the doctor suggested. "Maybe you could talk his language better than I do. You might get a decent meal out of it, too."

"It's a thought. A good one. Only Marian's probably got supper all ready by now. I better check in at home first. I don't know—would you say it was official Council business?"

"That's between you and your hunger," the doctor told him. "What do you want most—meat or Marian?"

"Damned if I know," Nick admitted, grinning.

"Doc!" It was Jim Kandro, running down the street toward them. "Hey, Tony! I just came from the hospital—looking all over . . ."

"What's up?"

"The baby! He's having convulsions."

"I'll go right over. Pick up my bag at the hospital, will you?"

JIM set off in one direction, and Tony in the other. "See you later," Nick called out to the doctor's rapidly retreating back.

At the Kandros, he found Polly, near-hysterical, with a struggling infant in her arms. Sunny was obviously in acute discomfort; the veins were standing out on his fuzzy scalp, he was struggling and straining feebly, his belly was distended and his cheeks puffed out uncomfortably.

"How's he been eating?" the doctor demanded, scrubbing his hands.

"The way you saw before," said Polly. "Better and better, but just the way you saw before, wiggling and pushing so half the time he was sucking on nothing at all. He was crying and crying, so I fed him three or four times and each time he got more—"

She fell silent as Tony picked up the baby and patted and stroked it. It burped loudly. The alarming red color faded and the tense limbs relaxed. With a whimper Sunny collapsed on the doctor's shoulder and fell asleep before he was back in his crib.

"But you said—" Polly gasped.

"I guess Sunny didn't hear me," Tony said.

"Here you are, Doc." Jim came

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in and looked from Polly's empty arms to the quiescent baby in the crib. "I guess you didn't need the bag. What was it?"

"Colic," Tony grinned. "Good, old-fashioned, Earthside colic."

"But you told me . . ." Jim turned accusingly on his wife.

"And I told Polly," Tony put in quickly. "It doesn't usually happen. Babies don't have to be burped on Mars—most of them, that is. The mask feeds richer air into a Mars baby's nose so he just naturally breathes through his nose *all* the time and doesn't swallow air and get colic when he feeds. But I guess Sunny had his heart set on a bellyache. Was he crying when he fed, Polly?"

"Why, yes, a little bit. Not really crying, a kind of whimper every now and then."

"That could explain it. All right, now you know it isn't serious. Just be sure to bubble him after feeding. Thank the Lord he's nursing. That young man of yours gave us all a bad time, but I think we're out of the woods now."

Sunny was going to be all right; for the first time, Tony really believed it.

Somehow that changed the whole dismal picture.

iii

TONY entered his own house and found Graham still sitting in front of his typewriter, not writing now, but reading through a pile of onionskin pages.

"Hi. I was waiting for you." The journalist looked pleased with himself. "I'll fix us some sandwiches if you'll do something about that coffee of yours. When you make it, it's almost drinkable."

There was a knock on the door.

"Come in," Tony called out.

"Oh, am I busting in on something?" Nick asked innocently.

"No, of course not. Glad to see you. Doug, this is Nick Cantrella. I don't know if you met him before. He's in charge of maintenance and equipment in the Lab, and a member of our Council. Nick, you know who Doug Graham is."

"Uh-huh. My rival. My wife's only true love."

"And you should see his wife," Tony added.

"This gets more and more interesting. You're not married to that lady pilot by any chance?" Graham extended a greasy hand. "No? Too bad. Join us? We're eating *meat!*"

"Don't mind if I do. How's the baby, Tony? Anything really wrong?"

"Yes and no. Colic. Good old colic," the doctor gloated. "It shouldn't happen, but, by God, it's something I know how to cope with; I think the kid's going to be all right. Coffee's ready. Where's the food?"

They munched sandwiches, and had "coffee" which Graham pro-

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nounced a very slight improvement over his own efforts. The two Sun Lakers were more than happy with it; it was sweetened with gratings from a brick of sugar produced by the gunther from his wonder-packed luggage. The same suitcase turned out to hold another bottle of Earthside liquor, and Graham poured drinks all around.

"It's a celebration," the writer insisted, when Tony, remembering his hangover, would have demurred. "I got a week's work done today. Whole first chapter—complete draft of the trip out and impressions of Marsport!" He fanned out a sheaf of pages covered with single-spaced typing, and corked the bottle.

Nick took a long deep swallow, settled back blissfully on the bunk where he was sitting. "Marcaine," he said at last. "That could explain it."

"What?"

"I've been sitting here imagining I was eating meat and drinking whiskey. Can you beat that?" He sipped more slowly this time, savoring the drink, and said determinedly to Graham, "You're just about up to Sun Lake in your notes then?"

"That's right," Graham said. In the silence that followed, he asked brightly: "Say, aren't you the guy who saw the brownie tracks."

"Brownie tracks? Who, me? You're sure you weren't thinking of unicorns?"

"Do unicorns leave little footprints?"

"Oh, that. Yeah, I saw something out around the caves in the Rimrock Hills. That's where the kids take the goats to graze."

"Are they allowed to go barefoot around there?" Graham asked.

"Allowed!" Nick exploded. "You haven't been ten years old for quite a long time, have you? How much attention do you think they pay?"

QUITE a bit, Tony thought, remembering his talk with Tad, but he didn't bring it up. Out loud he said: "I've got a theory about that. I've been thinking about it since last night, Doug. Maybe you can use it in your book." It wasn't smart, maybe, to keep riding the writer about it, but he'd had enough of brownies for awhile. "I'll tell you what I think. I think some kids who weren't supposed to do it went exploring in a cave, and one of them got lost. Then the rest wouldn't admit what happened, and all the search party could find was kid-sized footprints. So we have 'brownies'. And a couple of dozen retired prospectors back on Earth are coining money telling lies about them," he finished, more sharply than he meant to.

"I guess that squelches me," Graham laughed boisterously, picked up his papers, and stood up. "I better be getting along. Have to

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find out about getting this stuff radioed out." He started for the door, and almost collided with Anna coming in.

"Oh, I'm sorry. I forgot you had company, Tony. They kept me busy all day out at the Lab, and I thought maybe I could get some work done here this evening, but . . ." She smiled apologetically at Tony and Nick, then turned to Graham. "Were you going out?"

"Shouldn't I?"

"Of course not," said Tony. "Not when Anna's just come in. Stick around, and you'll see something."

"What does she do?" Graham asked. "Song and dance routine? Prestidigitation?"

Nick said from his perch on the wall bunk: "Graham, if you had an ounce of Earthside chivalry in your bloodstream, you'd uncork that bottle and offer the lady a drink."

"You're right. I'll even offer you one." Tony got another glass, and the writer poured. Then he turned to Anna, and asked again, "Well, what *do* you do?"

"I'm a glassblower, that's all. Tony likes to watch it, and he couldn't possibly understand that other people might not enjoy it as much."

"Oh. You do your work over here?"

"Yes," the doctor said testily. "Anna is also my assistant, if you recall—neither one is a full-time job, so she keeps her equipment here, and combines the two."

For a few minutes, the four of them sat talking inconsequentially, the three Sun Lakers answering Graham's endless variety of questions. Finally, Anna got up.

"If I'm going to get any work done, I better get started." She opened the cupboards and began pulling out equipment.

Graham stood up, too. "Well . . ." He picked up his sheaf of papers.

"Tony!"

ALL three men focused their attention on Anna, who stood facing them, her arms full of assorted junk.

"Tony," she said bluntly, "Have you told Mr. Graham about our problem here? Don't you think he might be able to help?"

"Well!" Graham sat down again, and suddenly grinned. "Tell me, what can I do for dear old Sun Lake?"

"You can save our necks," Nick told him soberly. "At least I think you can, if you want to. You're going back on the rocket," he explained, "and that rocket won't have our shipment on it, because—actually because— we *didn't* steal some marcaine we're accused of stealing. It's not here, so we couldn't find it, and that means Bell will throw a cordon around us on Shipment Day. You know Bell from way back. You could raise such a stink about what he's doing to us—if you wanted to—that there'd be

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orders recalling him to Earth on the next rocket that comes in. You're big enough to do it. And we don't know any other way."

"You're very flattering," the writer said, "and also too damn brief. I already know that much. Suppose you fill me in on some of the details."

"Bell tramped in three days ago," the doctor began carefully, and went through the story, step by step, not omitting the information he had picked up in Marsport, and reminding Graham at the same time about the Cham's new regulations against marcaine.

"Brenner wants to get his hands on the Sun Lake Lab," Tony wound up. "You got Bell kicked out of a good job once for crooked dealing. You could do it again. Unless Bell's got religion, and I see no sign of it, Brenner could easily hire him to kick us off Mars and then see that Brenner Pharmaceutical got the assets of the busted Sun Lake Colony—including the Lab—in a rigged auction."

The writer pondered, and then told them slowly: "I think I can do something about it. It's a good story, anyhow. The least I can do is try."

Nick let out a wild: "Wa-hoo!" and Tony slumped with relief. He looked back to Anna's work bench, smiling—but she was gone.

"Now that that's settled," said Graham, "I want a favor myself."

"Up to but not including my beautiful blonde wife," promised Nick fervently.

"If it was women, I'd want that lady airplane pilot. But it isn't women. I still want to get this stuff filed to Marsport by your radio. I'm going to have a crowded schedule before takeoff and every minute I clip off in advance, like getting this stuff typed and microfilmed, will help."

"Sure, pal! Sure!" Nick stood up and shook the writer's hand earnestly. "I'll take you to the radio shack myself and give you the blanchest carte you ever saw!"

CHAPTER SIXTEEN

It's a li'l Mars *baby,*
It's a li'l Mars *baby,*
It's a li'l Mars *baby,*
Li'l Mars baby
All—our—own!

IT WAS midnight, and Polly sang her song very softly, so as not to awaken Jim. Her hand, on the baby's back, caressed the tiny, clearly defined muscles, rigid now with concentration of effort. Her eyes filled with wonder as she watched Sunny nuzzle awkwardly, but successfully, against her breast.

He was eating! He was swallowing the milk, and not choking on it or spitting it back!

With a touch of awe at the thought that she was the only mother on Mars who had the privilege, she laid the baby over her

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shoulder and gently patted. Sunny bubbled and subsided. She laid him in the basket and sat watching him raptly. Jim rolled over and muttered, so she decided not to sing her song again. She was hungry, anyway. She touched her lips to the baby's forehead, straightened his mathematically straight blanket and went to the little pantry cupboard in the living room.

A dish of left over navy beans would settle her for two or three more hours of sleep. She found a spoon and began to eat, happily. She cleaned the dish and licked the spoon, put them away and started back for bed.

She was halfway to the bedroom door when it happened.

EVERYTHING went slower and slower and came to a stop. She was frozen to the floor, giggling—and she was also somewhere else, watching herself giggle. The reddish walls turned the most beautiful apple-green, her favorite color, and put forth vines and branches. They were apple tree branches, and they began to bear apples that were baby's heads—severed baby's heads, dripping rich delicious juice. The babies sang her song in a cheeping chorus, and she saw and heard herself giggle and sing with them, and pluck the heads from the branches, open her mouth—

"Jim!" she shrieked, and it all collapsed.

Her husband stood in the doorway, looked at her and leaped to catch her.

"Get Dr. Tony," she gasped after she had vomited and he had carried her to a chair. "I think I'm going crazy. There were these—get Dr. Tony, please, Jim!"

The thought of being left alone horrified her, but she clutched the chair arms, afraid to close her eyes while he was gone. She counted to more than a hundred, lost track and was starting again when Jim and the doctor burst in.

"Polly, what is it? What happened?"

"I don't know, Doctor, *I don't know!* It's all over now, but I don't know if it's going to come back. I *saw* things. I think . . . Tony, I think I'm crazy."

"You threw up," he reminded her. "Did you eat anything?"

"I was hungry after I nursed Sunny. I ate some beans—cold beans. And then it was horrible. It was like a nightmare, only I was watching myself . . ."

"This happened right after you ate the beans?" he demanded. "You didn't eat the beans earlier?"

"No, it was right after. I fed Sunny, and then I ate, and then it happened. I was frozen to the floor and I watched myself. I was going to do something horrible. I was going to . . ." She couldn't say it; she remembered it too clearly.

"That's too quick for food poisoning," the doctor said. "You froze, you say. And you watched

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yourself. And there were hallucinations."

"Yes, like the worst nightmare in the world; yet I was awake."

"Stay with her, Jim. I've got to get something. Can you clean up in here?"

Jim clenched his wife's hand in his big, red fist and then began to mop.

Tony came back with a black box they all knew—the electroencephalograph.

"Look here, Tony," growled Kandro. "If you're thinking that Polly's a drug addict, you're crazy."

Tony ignored him and strapped the electrodes to the woman's head. Three times he took traces, and they were identical. Positive brain waves.

"You were full of marcaine," he told her flatly. "Where did you get it?"

"Well, I *never*—" and "God damn it all, Doc—" the couple began simultaneously.

Tony relaxed. "I don't need a lie-detector," he said. "It must have been put on the beans. Lord knows how or why."

Polly asked incredulously: "You mean people go through that for *pleasure?*"

"You had the reaction of a well-balanced person. It's the neurotic who enjoys the stuff."

Polly shook her head dazedly.

"But what are we going to *do?*" demanded Jim.

"First thing is to get some bottles and nipples and goat's milk for you. Breast-feeding is out for at least the next week, Polly. There'd be marcaine in your milk. You don't want to wean Sunny now?"

"Oh, *no!*"

Tony smiled. "We'll have to get a breast pump made, too, to keep your supply going. But that can wait till morning."

"But—" protested Jim.

The doctor swung around to face him. "All right, what do *you* suggest we do?"

Jim thought and said hopelessly: "I don't know."

"NEITHER do I. I'm a doctor, not a detective. All I can do is write a formula for the baby, and get people moving right now turning out the stuff you need."

He stepped into the nursery for a moment to peer at Sunny, in the crib—a beautiful, healthy child. Tony wondered for a moment whether Polly's earlier fantasy about a menacing brownie had also been caused by her food being doped. There had been no nausea that time, but it might have been a smaller dose.

Time enough later to figure all that out; Sunny would be hungry again in a few hours.

"Jim," he directed, "you better beat it over to Anna Willendorf's and tell her we'll need bottles right away. And get some milk while you're out. If you move fast, we'll have time to boil it and make the

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first formula before Sunny wakes up again."

"Milk?" Jim said, dazed.

"Milk. From one of the goats. Don't you know how?"

"I've milked cows," Kandro said. "Couldn't be much different."

"One other thing," Tony called to Jim, who was already at the door. "Nipples. Get Bob Carmichael for that. I think he can figure out some way . . . make sure he checks with Anna on the size."

"Right." Jim closed the door behind him.

ii

THEY had the milk boiling on the alky stove when Anna arrived with the first bottle. "The others are still cooling," she explained. "I'll go back for them later, but I thought you'd need one right away." She handed it over, went to look down at the calmly sleeping baby, and asked Polly, "What can I do?"

"I don't know. Nothing, I guess. The doctor's showing me how to make formula and I suppose that's all there is. It was awfully nice of you to get up to make the bottles. I feel terrible about making so much trouble, but I just . . ." She trailed off helplessly.

"It wasn't your fault," Anna told her, then asked the doctor: "Do you want me to take over with the formula?"

"There's no need to," Tony told her. "For that matter, you can go back to bed if you want to. There shouldn't be any more trouble tonight."

"I have to go back and get the other bottles later anyhow," she protested. She took over at the stove, showing Polly the simple procedures of sterilization and measuring involved in the baby's formula.

Jim came back from a second trip to the Lab in time to boil up one of the new nipples, and fill a bottle before Sunny woke. Polly, still shaken, but determined to behave normally, picked the baby up and changed him, warmed the bottle herself under Anna's watchful eye, and settled herself on a chair with baby and bottle.

"You want to make sure the neck of the bottle is full of milk," Tony told her. "Aside from that, there's nothing difficult about it. Don't try to force his position. Let him wriggle around just as if he was at the breast." He watched while she nudged the new plastic nipple into his mouth. "That's right. Fine. I think he's going to take it all right."

Sunny sucked hungrily, wriggled, pushed his mouth sidewise, and then to the other side, sucking all the time. Milk spilled out the side of his mouth as he sucked without swallowing, and turned his reddening face from side to side, squirming desperately.

Tony, suddenly frightened, took

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a step forward. He could see the trouble clearly enough, but from above, looking down at the baby's face, Polly couldn't possibly see what was happening.

Sunny was trying to make use of the peculiar sidewise suckling he had developed at his mother's breast, but he couldn't wedge his small mouth around the comparatively firm plastic of the new nipple. Tony opened his mouth to speak; in a minute the baby would . . .

"Stop it! O-o-h-h stop it! You're choking—!"

Polly's hand, holding the bottle, shot away from the baby's mouth. Tony whirled to see Anna crumble to the floor, her mouth still open in the drawn-out shriek.

"Jim!" he shouted. "Quick! Take care of her!" Then he turned back again without waiting to see what Kandro did. He lifted the choking, convulsive infant out of Polly's limp arms, turned him upside down, and stroked the small stiff back vigorously. Within seconds, a thick curd of milk dribbled out of the baby's mouth, and the terrible gasping sounds turned into a low monotonous wailing.

TONY put the baby back in his mother's arms, and turned briefly to look at Anna. Jim had lifted her on to the wall bunk. Tony checked quickly to make sure she hadn't hurt herself.

"Just fainted," he said, puzzled, and gave Kandro instructions to restore consciousness.

Sunny's wailing was turning into a steady, vigorous hunger cry. The doctor picked him up again, and wrapped him in one of the warm new blankets.

"Where are you taking Sunny?" asked Polly with shrill nervousness.

"To the hospital." He turned to Jim, still standing over the unconscious Anna. "Don't let her leave when she comes to, Jim. I'll be back later."

He went out, carrying the screaming baby in one arm and his black bag in the other.

The walk back to his own house was haunted. The ghost of a newborn baby went with him along the curving street in the dark, a ghost that gasped and choked as Sunny did, twisting in agony until it died again as it had already died a thousand thousand times for Tony, only the first time was the worst, the first baby born and the first one dead in Sun Lake, and he'd had to watch it all, the ghost of a baby that died for want of air . . .

He went in by the hospital door. He didn't want to see Graham.

Systematically, he turned on the lights and assembled his instruments in the sterilizer, turned a heat lamp on the examination table, and stripped off the baby's clothes. This couldn't go on; there had to be an answer to Sunny's troubles, and he was going to find it now, tonight.

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Tony examined the child with every instrument and technique in his repertory. He felt it, probed and thumped it, listened to its interior plumbing. He could find nothing that resembled organic trouble. And he could think of no rational explanation for a mask baby breathing through its mouth.

"It's got to be nasal," he said out loud. Three times he had used the otoscope, and three times he had found no obstruction. But—

CAREFULLY, Tony slipped the mask off Sunny's nose. He slipped it over the mouth instead, stifling its scream in mid-voice. At least, he thought grimly, the baby would *have* to breathe through the mask now if it wanted to keep on crying. The doctor began to probe delicately into one nostril, and Sunny promptly reacted with the unexpected. Impossible or not, he tried to draw a breath through his exposed nostrils, found an impediment and began to choke again.

Tony withdrew the slender probe and stared at the gasping, red-faced infant. For just a moment, a clear and frightening picture of the other baby blotted out what was before his eyes—the ghost baby that had come up the street with them. Then he looked at Sunny again and everything began to fall into place.

Sunny was the wrong color.

He should have been blue and he wasn't. He was gasping for air, he couldn't breathe; he should have been oxygen starved. *And he was flushed a bright crimson!*

It wasn't lack of oxygen, then. It was impossible! But it was the only logical answer. Tony removed the mask from the baby's face with trembling hands.

He waited.

It took Sun Lake City Colony Kandro less than thirty seconds to do what Tony knew he couldn't do —and most certainly would do. Sunny gasped sharply for a moment. Then this breathing became even, his color turned a normal healthy pink, and he resumed his monotonous hunger cry.

Sunny didn't need an oxygen mask at all to survive on Mars, nor did he need OxEn.

The fact was scientifically paralyzing . . . the child was adapted not to the rich air of Earth, but the deadly thin atmosphere of Mars!

—CYRIL JUDD

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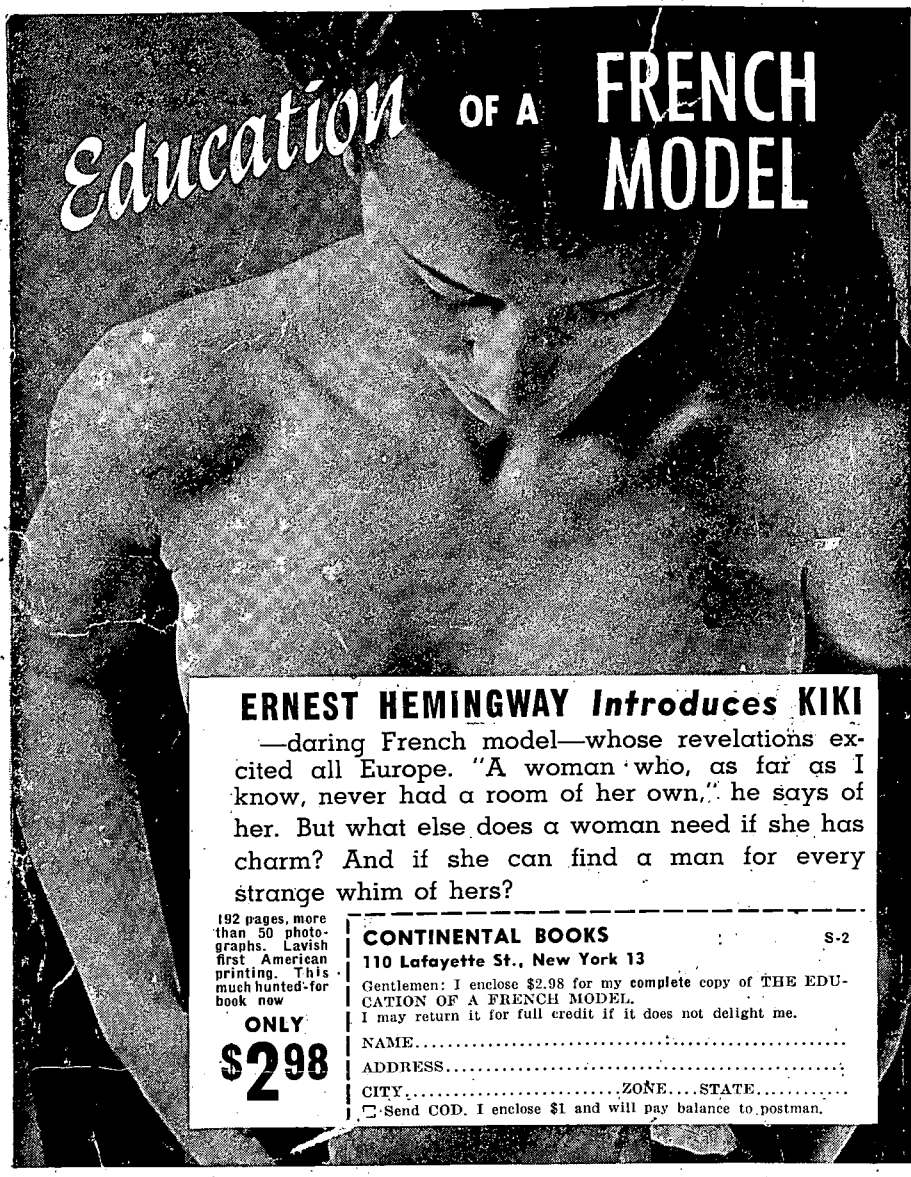

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